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A FAMILY AFFAIR

A Nobel

BY

HUGH CONWAY

AUTHOR OF 'CALLED BACK,' 'DARK DAYS,' ETC.

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A FAMILY AFFAIR.

CHAPTER I.

A LITTLE DERELICT.

It was a dreary, dismal, wintry afternoon. All the lights of Paddington Station were needed to conquer the damp fog which filled the arched expanse from end to end. The broad platform teemed with the motion and bustle attendant upon the departure of a train. The newspaper boys alone were having a comparatively dull time of it, as the first act of every passenger, upon taking his seat, was to pull up the window, and shut out as much fog as possible, declining to let the sash down for any one, except other travellers, who, having paid their fares, claimed their right to seats in the train—a proceeding which, to the first installed passenger, always seems supremely selfish. The new-comer, or comers, might choose some other compartment than his!

The moving rack which bears the lamps reached the extreme end of the train. The strong-armed official below hurled the last crystal globe to the nimble official who runs along the top of the carriages, and leaps so recklessly from one to another. Deft as an Indian juggler, he caught the gleaming missile, slapped it into the last socket, and sprang incontinently from the already moving train. The guard shut the last door which somebody's carelessness had left open, jumped into his van as it swept by him, and, punctual to the minute, the five o'clock train left London, and began its race to Penzance.

In one of the first-class compartments were three passengers, although the railway company would only benefit to the extent of two fares; one of these passengers being a child still young enough to be passed off as a child in arms by all save, perhaps, those tender-minded persons who send conscience-money to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The two travellers who augmented the company's revenue were a man and a woman.

That they were strangers was evident, and it was also evident that the man was an old traveller. As soon as the train was in motion, and he felt insured for some time to come against disturbance, he arranged his wraps in the most approved fashion, donned a soft cap, lit a lamp, and buried himself in a book. He was a young man; but as he appears in this tale only to disappear, a detailed description would be superfluous. It is enough to know he was a gentleman, well-dressed, well-to-do in appearance, and looked quite in his proper place in a first-class carriage.

It was a different matter with the woman. There was no obvious reason why she should not be able and willing to pay threepence-halfpenny instead of a penny a mile for the privilege of being whisked to her destination; yet one could imagine a crusty old director, who travels free himself, and is therefore anxious to prevent the company from being defrauded, calling to a guard and suggesting that the woman's ticket should be examined. Or, from purely benevolent reasons, a person who knows what mistakes women make in such matters might, with propriety, have remarked, "How comfortable these first-class carriages are." For my part, I should most certainly have done so—not from benevolence; but to save myself, who had paid just fare, from feeling swindled if, at the journey's end, a good-natured ticket-collector let off the victim of such a comfortable mistake.

Yet there was nothing remarkable in the woman's appearance, except the utter absence of individuality it displayed. For any guidance her looks gave, she might have been rich or poor, young or old, beautiful or ugly, noble or simple. Had her travelling companion been as

curious as he was at present indifferent about the matter, he might have sat opposite to her from London to the Land's End, yet not have known how to classify her. She was dressed in plain black—and black, like charity and night, covereth and hideth much. No scrap of bright ribbon, no vestige of colour, broke the sombre monotony of her attire, and a thick black veil hid the upper part of her face. She sat like one in a thoughtful frame of mind. Her head was bent forward, and so threw her mouth and chin into the shade. Her hands being gloved, it was impossible to know whether she wore a wedding-ring or not.

Of the child, a little boy, there was nothing that could be seen except a mass of bright golden hair. The woman had wound a thick woollen shawl around him, and held him close to her bosom. He was no annoyance to any one, for, shortly after the train started, he fell fast asleep. Indeed, so inoffensive were his travelling companions, that the gentleman, who had felt somewhat disgusted when a woman and a child entered the compartment, began to hope that, after all, he need not shift his quarters at the first stoppage.

The train sped on through the white fog. It was a fast train, but not so fast as to give itself airs and decline stopping more than twice in a hundred miles. Near Reading the speed slackened. The gentleman with the book breathed an inward prayer that he might not be disturbed. He did not notice that, as the train drew up at the platform, the woman half rose from her seat, as if her journey was at an end; then, after a moment's hesitation, re-seated herself in her former attitude. The travellers were not disturbed. The train shot on once more. Still the gentleman read his book—still the silent woman held the sleeping child.

In less than half an hour Didcot was reached. The woman, after a quick glance, to assure herself that the reader was intent upon his book, pressed her lips upon the child's golden head, and kept them there until the train stopped. For a minute or two she remained motionless, then, laying the child on the seat, rose quickly and

opened the carriage door. The reader looked up as the cold, damp air rushed into the heated compartment.

"You have no time to get out," he said; "we are off in a minute."

If she heard the well-meant caution, she paid no heed to it. She made no reply, but, stepping on to the platform, closed the carriage door behind her. The young man shrugged his shoulders, and resumed his interrupted paragraph. It was no business of his if a stupid woman chose to risk missing the train.

Although, two minutes afterwards, when he found the train in rapid motion, and himself and the sleeping child the only tenants of the compartment, he saw that, after all, he was primarily concerned in the matter. In spite of his warning, the mother had been left behind, and he was in the unenviable position of having a child thrown upon his hands until the next stoppage.

Although he was a bachelor, and one who knew nothing of the ways of children, he scarcely felt justified in pulling the emergency cord. Swindon would be reached in less than an hour—there he would be relieved. So he could do no more than anathematise the careless mother, and pray that the child's slumbers might be unbroken. Whatever effect the objurgation may have had, he soon saw that his prayer was not to be granted. The child, no doubt missing its protector's embrace, opened its eyes and began to struggle. It would have rolled off the seat, had not its enforced guardian, who was a good-natured, kind-hearted young fellow, picked it up and transferred it to his knee.

He meant well, although he did not handle it very skilfully. A man must go through a course of painful experiences before he learns how to dandle a child properly. Our friend did his best, but so clumsily that the woollen shawl fell from the child, and disclosed a large ticket sewn on to the dress beneath. On it was written, "H. Talbert, Esq., Hazlewood House, Oakbury, near Blacktown." The young man applauded the good sense which had provided for a contingency which had really come to pass. Then

he settled down to do the best he could towards supplying the place of the missing woman until the stoppage at Swindon might bring deliverance.

Swindon at last. Here the ill-used traveller called the guard, and, as that official is of course paid to undertake all sorts of delicate and unforeseen duties, with perfect fairness shifted all further responsibility on to his shoulders, resumed the perusal of his book, and troubled no more about the matter.

The guard, without disputing his position of guardian to all unprotected travellers, hardly knew what to do in the present emergency. The hope that the foolish mother had managed to get into another carriage was dispelled by her not making her appearance. He was also puzzled by the careful way in which the child was labelled. This guard had seen some curious things in his time, and, as the missing woman had left not a scrap of luggage behind, thought it not improbable that the desertion of the child was due to intention, not accident. At first he thought of leaving the tiny derelict at Swindon, on the chance that the mother would arrive by the next train from Didcot. But the more he thought the matter over the more convinced he felt that no mother would arrive by the next or any following train. Being himself a family man, and feeling most kindly disposed towards the little golden head which nestled in the most confiding way against his great brown beard, he decided to take the child on to Blacktown and thence forward it as addressed. He pulled a couple of cushions out of a first-class carriage, put them in one corner of his van, and tucked up little Golden-head as snugly as any mother could have done; so snugly and comfortably that the child at once closed its blue eyes, and slept until the train reached Blacktown.

There the guard carried the little fellow into the refreshment-room, and, leaving him in charge of the pleasant young ladies, went to look for a sober yet speculative man who would take the child to Oakbury on the chance of being paid for his trouble. He even gave this man half a crown—to be repaid out of his prospective reward—for cab-

hire. Then, after another look at the little waif, who was drinking milk, munching a biscuit, and being made very much of by the refreshment-room young ladies, our guard rushed back to his somewhat neglected duties, and was soon spinning down west at the rate of thirty-five miles an hour.

CHAPTER II.

A FAMILY OF POSITION.

BE it remembered that Oakbury is not Blacktown. Many of its inhabitants are greatly annoyed when they hear it called a suburb of Blacktown. Oakbury is near the large city, but not of it. Although the fact cannot be ignored that the existence of the many charming country-houses which adorn Oakbury is as much due to its contiguity to the dirty thriving town as to its natural beauties—and although a certain proportion of those desirable residences has been purchased by Blacktown's successful traders—the most aristocratic inhabitants of Oakbury look with indifference on the good and evil fortunes of the city. They, the aristocratic inhabitants, are useful to Blacktown, not Blacktown to them. They are out of its dissensions and struggles; better still, beyond the range of its taxation. They are of the county, not the town. So they head their letters, "Oakbury, Westshire;" and, as a rule, decline intimacy with any Blacktown trader under the rank of banker or merchant prince.

Besides Lord Kelston's well-known country-seat, there must be in the parish of Oakbury some twenty or twenty-five gentlemen's residences. They cannot be called estates, as the ground attached to each varies respectively from three to fifty acres, but not a few of them might lay claim to be described by that well-rounded phrase, dear to auctioneers and house agents, "a country mansion, fit for the occupation and requirements of a family of position." They are not new, speculative, jerry-built houses, but good, old-fashioned, solid affairs. No painted and gilt railings surround

them; thick boundary walls and fine old trees hide them from the gaze of inquisitive holiday folks. As the country around is very beautiful and richly timbered; as the prevailing wind which blows across Oakbury comes straight from the sea, pure and uncontaminated; as two of the best packs of hounds in England meet within an easy distance; and, prejudice notwithstanding, as the conveniences offered by a large city are so close at hand—it is no wonder that the rector of Oakbury numbers many families of position among his parishioners. If mine were a family of position, it should most certainly occupy a pew in that fine old square-towered church.

After this description it will be easily believed that the Oakbury people are somewhat exclusive—by the Oakbury people are meant the inhabitants of the aforesaid twenty houses: the manners of the villagers and other small fry who constitute the residue of the population need not be taken into account. The Oakbury people proper are very particular as to with whom they associate, and the most particular and exclusive of all are two gentlemen named Talbert, the joint owners and occupiers of Hazlewood House.

Their ultra-exclusiveness was but the natural outcome of the position in which they were placed. The fact that their income was derived from money made by their father in timber, tobacco, soap, sugar, or some other large industry of Blacktown—people have already nearly forgotten which it was—must be responsible for the care the Talberts were bound to exercise before they made a new acquaintance.

Because, you see, in their opinion at least, the taint of trade still clung to them. They were but a generation removed from the actual buying, selling, and chaffering. Metaphorically speaking, their own father's hands had been hardened by the timber, stained by the tobacco, lathered by the soap, made sticky by the sugar, according to the particular branch of trade at which he had worked to such advantage. So it was that upon attaining the earliest years of discretion the sons decided that it was more incumbent upon them than upon the generality of persons to be

peculiarly particular in their choice of friends. As they were amiable, right-feeling young men, they looked upon this duty as a sad necessity.

Had they been tempted to swerve from this line of conduct, respect for their father should have kept them steadfast. He had always impressed the great duty upon them. Before the two boys were out of the nursery, the great *coup* which is expected by every sanguine business man came off. Mr. Talbert realised his capital and sold his business. He obtained less for it because he made the stipulation that his name should no longer appear in connection with it. Then, a widower with one daughter and two sons, he bought Hazlewood House, and settled down to drift gradually into good society.

He educated his children by this creed. It is the duty of all people to rise in the world—both in commercial and social circles. Thanks to his exertions and good fortune, the first half of the obligation had been discharged. The second rested chiefly with his children. He did not tell them this in definite words, but all the same preached it to them most eloquently, and was more than content, and felt that the fruits of his training were showing themselves when his daughter married Sir Maingay Clauson, a fairly respectable and well-to-do baronet.

This satisfactory alliance gave the Talberts a lift in the social scale; although, so far as Oakbury was concerned, it was little needed. Mr. Talbert had now been out of business for at least ten years. He was quiet, gentlemanly, and, if not retiring, at least unobtrusive. His wealth was estimated at about three times its correct amount. With these advantages he already found himself well received by the families of position, his neighbours. Content as he no doubt felt on his own account, he nevertheless held up their sister's brilliant match as an example to his sons, and talked so much about the necessity of their choosing their intimates fittingly that it is marvel the young men did not speedily develop into fools or snobs.

But even now when verging upon middle age they were neither—although any man who would decline your

At last old Talbert died. His successful daughter had been dead a long time. The old man left Hazlewood House and its contents to his sons conjointly. The rest of his fortune he divided into three parts, and left in this proportion to each of his children or their children, if any. Then the sons met at Hazlewood House and considered what they should do.

First of all, as was becoming, they made up their differences. Very little was said on either side, but it was understood that cordial relations were re-established. At which happy conclusion each man rejoiced greatly—the six years' separation had been a terrible affair—and tacitly registered a vow that for the future his brother's affairs should be his own, distinct, private property.

By this time our friends had grown rather weary of gadding about. Moreover, it was due to their position that some place should be called their home. For nearly twenty years they had lived in the various capitals of Europe, and they knew that they had conquered society. Indeed it is doubtful whether any two men, not celebrities, were better known than Horace and Herbert Talbert. So they resolved to settle down and begin housekeeping on their own account.

They collected their art treasures, and being, not traders, but still thorough men of business, in order to save any question arising in a remote future, made exact inventories of their respective belongings, down to the uttermost, smallest, and most cracked cup and saucer. Then they combined their collections, and made Hazlewood House curiously beautiful with paintings, china, and bric-à-brac. This done, they settled down into quiet domestic life, and kept their house as methodically and carefully; and no doubt a great deal better than any two old women could have done.

Of course, with their cultivated tastes, their general acquirements, their cosmopolitan experiences, and the many desirable friends they were known to possess, the Talberts' standing in Oakbury was undeniable. They were a credit to the neighbourhood, and might, had they not

been too good-hearted to dream of such a proceeding, have snubbed any one of the families of position without dreading reprisals. If people laughed at their womanish ways, effeminate proceedings, and domestic economics, they were, nevertheless, always glad to entertain or to be entertained by the Talberts. The latter need not be wondered at. The little dinners at Hazlewood House were the pink of culinary civilisation—the crystallisation of refined gastronomic intelligence.

CHAPTER III.

AN ARGUMENT AND AN ARRIVAL.

ON the night when the down-train carried the golden-headed child to Blacktown the Talberts had dined at home, without company. The two men were still at the table, sipping their claret and smoking cigarettes. They were neither great drinking men nor great smoking men. If such habits are sins, the Talberts might have gone on as they were going for many years, and then made atonement very easily. It is needless to state that the two brothers were faultlessly dressed in the evening garb of the nineteenth century. It will also be guessed that the dinner-table was most tastefully laid out. In spite of the season being mid-winter, it was gay with flowers. Quaint antique silver spoons and forks did the duty which is exacted from the florid king's pattern and the ugly fiddle pattern abominations of our day. The napery was of the whitest and finest description. The polish on the glass such as to make the most careful housewife or conscientious servant wonder and envy. There is a tale connected with the glass.

Once upon a time a lady who was dining at Hazlewood House asked her hosts, with pardonable curiosity, how they were able to induce their servants to send the decanters and wine glasses to the table in such a glorious state of refulgency. Horace Talbert smiled, and answered with exquisite simplicity—

“We should never think of trusting our glass to the hands of servants. My brother and I see to it ourselves.”

Thereupon the lady, who had marriageable sisters, and was no doubt keenly alive to the fact that her hosts were

eligible bachelors, said, "It was very sweet of them to take so much trouble;" but her husband, who heard the question and the answer, burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. His was a low, coarse, commonplace mind, utterly unable to divest the ideal from the material. To such a grovelling nature the picture of these two six-foot brawny men washing and rubbing their rare and costly glass seemed intensely comical.

The Talberts showed no sign of annoyance; they even smiled gravely in response to his vulgar mirth; but Hazlewood House knew that person no more.

But the wretch took his revenge after the manner of his kind. Unluckily, in spite of his faults, his position in the county was not to be despised, and more unluckily he possessed a certain amount of humour of the low class. He was brutal enough to nickname our friends the "Tabbies," and, appropriate or not, the name clung to them, and will cling for ever and ever. This is but another proof of how careful a man should be in the selection of his friends.

Although to-night the glass was as radiant as ever, there was at present no one to admire it save its owners and caretakers. By virtue of his year of seniority, Horace Talbert sat at the head of the table. Herbert was at his right hand. The two brothers were strangely alike both in figure and face. They were brown-haired men, with long straight noses, calm, serious eyes, rather arched eyebrows, and average foreheads. Each wore a well-kept beard and moustache, the beard clipped close and terminating in a point at the chin—a fashion which suited their long oval faces remarkably well, and, perhaps, added a kind of old-world courtliness to their general appearance. Their looks may be summed up by saying that the Talberts were men who one felt ought to possess a picture gallery of distinguished ancestors. The absence of such a desirable possession seemed a heartless freak of nature.

The room in which the brothers were sitting was furnished with a bold mixture of modern and antique. Where comfort and utility were the first considerations, the modern prevailed; where ornament or decoration had to be supplied,

the antique, often the grotesque antique, was called into requisition. On the high carved mantelpiece stood Oriental bronze vases with hideous dragons creeping round them, and gaping, grinning kylins, who looked mockingly and fearlessly at the fierce metal monsters. They knew—old china figures know more than people suspect—that the dragons were welded to their vases more irrefragably than Prometheus to his rock.

Here and there was a plate of rich coloured *cloisonné* enamel, a piece of Nankin china, a specimen of old brass work, a bracket of *real* old carved oak, an antique lamp, or some other article dear to the collector. Some half a dozen medium-sized but valuable paintings hung upon the walls. The floor was covered by a sober-hued Persian carpet, and, of course, a roaring fire filled the grate.

The Talberts looked very grave—as grave and solemn as Roman fathers in high debate. They were, indeed, discussing a weighty matter. After an interval of silence Herbert rose and walked to his brother's side. The two looked critically down the table. They went to the bottom and looked up the table. They went to the sides and looked across the table; they even sent glances diagonally from corner to corner.

"It is certainly a great improvement," said Horace, with quiet triumph.

"A great improvement," echoed the other. "Echo" is the right word—even their voices were alike.

In a contented frame of mind they resumed their seats, their claret, and their cigarettes. The great improvement was this:—

For some time past these excellent housekeepers had been sorely exercised by the conventional way in which laundresses fold table-cloths. They did not like the appearance of the three long creases on the snowy expanse. They turned their inventive abilities to account, and a week ago walked down to the residence, redolent of soap and hot water, of the woman who did their washing, and startled the poor creature out of her wits by insisting upon their table-cloths being folded in a new and improved fashion.

They even demonstrated their meaning by a practical experiment, and so impressed the nymph of the wash-tub and mangle with the importance they attached to the matter, that she had actually managed to learn her lesson well enough for the result of their teaching to give them great satisfaction.

Coffee was brought in, and the two gentlemen were about to leave the dining-room, when the Rev. Mr. Mordle was announced. Mr. Mordle was the curate of Oakbury, and always a welcome guest at Hazlewood House. It was an unspoken axiom of the Talberts that the Church set the seal of fitness upon her servants, or, at least, upon her upper servants. Organ blowers, parish clerks, and pew openers were the lower servants—so, all things being equal, a clergyman could always break through the exclusiveness which reigned at Hazlewood House. Mr. Mordle was clever in his way, full of talk, and of course knew every in and out of the parish, in the administration to the wants of which he must have found the Talberts a great assistance. All great men have their weaknesses—perhaps their friendship for Mr. Mordle was the Talberts' weakness. But then they dearly loved having a finger in the pie parochial, leaving out of the question the fact that they liked the curate, and in the kindness of their hearts pitied his loneliness. So he often dropped in like this, uninvited, and no doubt felt the privilege to be a great honour.

On Mr. Mordle's side, he could thoroughly appreciate humour, the more so when its existence was quite unsuspected by the sedate humorist. To him the study of Horace and Herbert was a matter of keen and enduring delight.

They rose and greeted him. "Excuse me," said Horace rather nervously, "did——"

"Yes, I did," answered the curate briskly. "I rubbed them—I scrubbed them—my feet feel red-hot. I could dance a minuet on your table-cloth without soiling it."

The redundancy of the answer set their minds at rest. The bugbear of their domestic lives was persons entering their rooms without having first wiped their shoes as every Christian gentleman should. The hall door was so heavily

armed with mats and scrapers that such an omission seemed an impossibility. Yet sometimes it did occur, and its effects were terrible—almost tragic.

Horace rang for more claret; Herbert passed his cigarette case, and the three men chatted for a while on various subjects. Presently said Horace with sad decision:

"Ann Jenkins came to us the day before yesterday. She told a piteous tale. We gave her five shillings."

"Very good of you," said the curate; "she has a long family—nine, I think."

"Yes; but we are sorry now that we gave the money. We are sure she is not a careful, thrifty woman."

The curate's eyes twinkled. He knew Ann Jenkins well—too well.

"Careful and thrifty people wouldn't want your half-crowns. But how did you find out her true character?"

Mr. Mordle expected to hear a mournful account of a domiciliary visit to Ann Jenkins, and a dissertation upon the various and almost original stages of untidiness in which his friends had found her numerous progeny. But the truth was better than he had bargained for.

"We walked behind her across the field this morning," said Horace, with grave regret. "When she got over the stile we saw she had on two odd stockings, a black one and a gray one—or blue and gray, I am not certain which."

"Blue and gray," said Herbert. "I noticed particularly."

"Her tastes, like yours," said the curate, "may be cultured enough to avoid Philistine uniformity."

"Oh dear, no," said Herbert seriously. "We argue in this way. The woman has two pairs of stockings——"

"I doubt it," said the curate. "But never mind—go on." His friends were surpassing themselves!

"She has two pairs—one gray, the other blue or black. She has worn one stocking into holes. Instead of sitting down and darning it, like a decent body, she simply puts on one of the other pair."

"Why doesn't she put on the other pair altogether?" asked Mr. Mordle.

"Because," said Horace triumphantly, "one stocking of that pair is in the same dilapidated condition: so her conduct is doubly bad. As I said, she is not a deserving woman."

"Granting your premises," said Mr. Mordle, "your argument is not illogical. Your reasoning appears sound, your deductions correct. But——"

The curate was preparing for a delicious battle on the subject, well worn or otherwise, of Ann Jenkins's hose. He meant to learn why one stocking of either pair should wear out before its fellow, and many other fanciful combinations were forming themselves in his subtle brain, when the interest in the mended or unmended stockings was extinguished by the entrance of the Talberts' irreproachable-looking man-servant. He informed his masters that the man had brought the child.

"What man? What child?" asked Horace. "Do you expect a man or a child, Herbert?"

"Certainly not. What do you mean, Whittaker?"

"A railway man has brought a child, sir. He says it is to be left here."

"There must be some stupid mistake."

"No doubt, sir," said Whittaker respectfully, but showing that his opinion quite coincided with his masters'.

"Where is the man?" asked Horace.

"In the hall, sir."

"Did he wipe his shoes?" asked Herbert in dread.

"Certainly, sir; I insisted upon his doing so."

"We had better see the stupid man and set the matter right," said Horace. "Excuse us for a moment, Mr. Mordle."

The two tall men walked into the hall, leaving Mr. Mordle to chuckle at his ease. Hazlewood House was certainly a most interesting place this evening. It was lucky for the curate that he indulged in his merriment with his face turned from the door, as in a minute the respectable Whittaker entered the room. That functionary was most tenacious that due respect should be shown to his masters. Most probably the look of vivid amusement

on Mr. Mordle's features would, had he seen it, have made an enemy for life of the faithful Whittaker.

"Mr. Talbert and Mr. Herbert would be glad if you would step out for a moment, sir."

Thereupon Mr. Mordle went into the hall and saw a most comical sight—the solemnity of the actors concerned not being the least comical part of it. Standing sheepishly on the door mat, or rather on one of the legion of door mats, was a stolid-faced porter in his uniform of brown fustian, velveteen, or whatever they call the stuff. On either side of the massive oblong hall-table stood one of the Talberts, whilst between them, on the table itself, was a child with a mass of tumbled, flossy golden hair streaming down from under a natty little cap. Horace and Herbert, each armed with his horn-rimmed eye-glass, and with looks of utter consternation and bewilderment upon their faces, were bending down and inspecting the child.

To Mr. Mordle's imaginative mind, the group suggested a picture he had once seen of the Brobdignagians taking stock of Gulliver: nor could the picture have been in any way spoiled when he himself, a tall man, went to one end of the table, whilst Whittaker, another tall man, stood at a becoming distance from the other end, and joined in the scrutiny of the diminutive stranger.

"This is a most extraordinary thing!" said Horace. "The child is sent by rail addressed here."

Mr. Mordle read the ticket: "H. Talbert, Esq., Hazlewood House, Oakbury, near Blacktown."

"Where did you say it came from?" asked Herbert, turning to the stolid-faced porter. "Let us hear all about it again."

"Guard of five o'clock down, gentlemen; he says child was left in first-class carriage. Mother got out at Didcot, and missed the train or didn't come back. Guard told me to get cab and bring the child here. Said I'd be paid well for my trouble. Cab was three and six, gentlemen."

"There must be some mistake. What are we to do?" asked the brothers.

"Don't expect any visitors, I suppose?" asked the curate.

"None whatever. You must take the child away again," said Horace, turning to the porter. The man gaped.

"What am I to do with it, sir?" he asked.

"Lost parcels office," suggested Mr. Mordle quietly. Whittaker gave him a reproachful look. The matter was too serious a one for jest.

"Cut the label off," was the curate's next piece of advice. "There may be a letter under it."

They took it off. The label was a piece of writing-paper gummed on to a plain card which had been torn or cut irregularly. No letter was concealed beneath it. Then they searched the pockets of the child's little coat, but found nothing. Their perplexity increased.

"I'll wish you good evening, gentlemen," said the porter. "Cab was three-and-six." The "Tabbies" were on the horns of a dilemma. The eyes which could detect the discrepancy in the unfortunate Mrs. Jenkins's stockings were able to see that the baby was well, even very well clad. It was just possible that a letter had miscarried—possible that some one was coming to Hazlewood House without invitation or notice—that she had really missed the train at Didcot; that she would arrive in the course of an hour or two and explain matters. The safest plan was to keep the child for a while.

Having settled this, Horace fished five shillings out of his pocket and sent the porter away happy. Thereupon Herbert produced a half-crown which he handed to his brother, who pocketed it without comment and as a matter of course. They were not miserly men, but made a point of being just and exact in their dealings with one another down to the uttermost farthing. Much annoyance would be saved if all men were the same as the Talberts with respect to small sums. Nevertheless, this rigid adjustment of matters pecuniary was a trait in their characters which greatly tickled Mr. Mordle.

All the while the little boy, with fat sturdy legs placed well apart, stood upon the great oak hall-table. The lantern

of many-coloured glass over his head threw rich warm tints on his sunny hair. He seemed in no way shy or terrified ; indeed, if any fault could be found in his bearing, it was that his manners were more familiar than such a short acquaintance justified. As the dignified brothers once more bent over him to resume their examination, he seized Mr. Herbert's watch chain in his chubby fist and laughed delightedly—a laugh which Mr. Mordle echoed. He had long looked for a suitable excuse for expressing his feelings in this way. The situation was so funny. An unknown child foisted upon his friends at this hour of the night ! No dirty beggar's brat, but a pretty, well-dressed little boy, old enough to possess a row of tiny white teeth, but not, it seemed, old enough to give any explanation of this unwarrantable intrusion. The child had such large bright blue eyes, such wonderful golden hair, such fearless and confident ways, that Herbert, who was fond of children, patted the bright head and pulled out his watch that the little rascal might hear it tick ; whilst Mordle slipped back to the dining-room and returned with a couple of unwholesome macaroons.

“Nearest way to a child's heart through the stomach,” he said, as the youngster deserted his first friend for the sake of the sweets.

Horace eyed these advances discontentedly. “But what is to be done ?” he said.

Just then the muffled strains of a piano passed through the closed door of the drawing-room.

“I should think,” said the curate, “you had better take Miss Clauson's advice on the subject.”

CHAPTER IV.

BEATRICE'S PROPOSAL.

IN describing Hazlewood House and its belongings, no mention has been made of Miss Clauson, for this reason—her position in that well-regulated establishment was, as yet, scarcely defined. She was neither mistress nor guest. She was in short the only daughter—indeed the only surviving result of that brilliant marriage made by Miss Talbert when she allied herself with Sir Maingay Clauson, Bart.

There is no reason for enlarging upon the admirable way in which Lady Clauson filled the position which her own merits had gained, or to which Fate had assigned her. Socially and domestically—in the outward as well as the inward life—she was all a baronet's wife should be—all save that she presented her husband with no heir to his title and estates. This was a sad omission, but, for the sake of her many other good qualities, Sir Maingay overlooked it, and made her a very good husband, as husbands go. When Lady Clauson died, some twelve years after the birth of the daughter who lived, Sir Maingay wept copiously. He even opened his Bible—the first time for many years—and by the aid of *Cruden's Concordance*, looked out a text appropriate to her many virtues. Moreover, for her sake, or his own, he remained single for five long years. Then he went the way of all middle-aged, titled, wife-bereft flesh, and married again.

Beatrice Clauson, just about to leave school, a romantic young lady, whose head for the present was, however, only occupied by pretty filial dreams of looking after her father, ministering to his comforts, ruling his house, and generally

doing the best she could to fill the place of her dead mother, found herself without a word of warning presented to a new mother, one, moreover, but four years older than herself. It was a crushing blow! It was a girl's first lesson in the vanity and unstability of mundane expectations.

She ought, of course, to have anticipated it; but she was young, and, like most young people, considered her middle-aged father abnormally old and staid. Besides, she could remember her own mother well enough, and remembered also Sir Maingay's sincere grief when death claimed his wife. She remembered the way in which the weeping man threw his arms around herself and told her that she was now his ALL—his treasured memento of his wife—his one tie to life. Recalling all this, she was sanguine enough to fancy that memory was even more vivid, that grief had graven its lines deeper with her father than with herself. So the bolt came from the bluest of the blue!

At seventeen Beatrice Clauson was still a spoiled child. All distracted widowers, until they marry again, spoil an only child; therefore, if only on salutary grounds, a second alliance is to be recommended. We will, then, take it for granted that at the time of Sir Maingay's second marriage Miss Clauson was spoiled. Moreover, we may at least suspect that she was both impetuous and stubborn, headstrong and romantic; also in her own way as proud as Lucifer.

The second Lady Clauson was a beauty, and nothing more. Her family was what is called respectable—a term, the signification of which no man or woman has as yet been able exactly to define. Like the Bible, we interpret it as we choose.

When the enforced meeting between Lady Clauson and her step-daughter took place, the young lady, by means of those signs and tokens, the masonry of which women alone fully comprehend, showed the state of her mind so clearly, that war to the knife was then and there declared.

And civil war in families—baronets or otherwise—is a deplorable thing: doubly deplorable for the neutral parties, who lack the excitement of the internecine combat. For a while Sir Maingay's life was anything but a happy one.

It matters little who was most to blame—the girl for her unreasonableness and stubborn spirit, and want of resignation to the inevitable—Lady Clauson for retaliating with all an injured woman's pettiness and spite—Sir Maingay for the thoroughly man-like conduct in letting things drift. They did drift with a vengeance! The breach between the two ladies soon became too enormous to be bridged over by any family diplomatic engineering.

The skirmishes between the belligerents are not worth noticing. The battle-royal was fought when the time came for Miss Clauson to be presented. Lady Clauson asserted that she was the proper person to present her step-daughter. Beatrice coldly declined her aid. Her ladyship insisted—her step-daughter was firm in her refusal. Sir Maingay declared himself under his wife's banner, and for once attempted to assert parental authority. Whereupon Miss Clauson cut the matter short, and declined being presented at all. It was a most dreadful state of affairs! You can, at least, drive a horse to the water, even if you can't make him drink; but you dare not haul a refractory young woman into the presence of a gracious sovereign.

Lady Clauson, who was rigidly exact in following the prescribed usages of society, may not have been far wrong when she declared that "a baronet's daughter, who refused to be presented, was—well, a monstrosity!"

Sir Maingay began to wish his ancestors had not separated themselves from the Roman Catholic communion. He could have sent his daughter to a nunnery. But then, he sadly reflected, she wouldn't have gone at any price. If put there by force, the Protestant League would soon have her out; and perhaps take her round the country spouting. The only thing the worried baronet could think of was to send for his rebel, and ask her advice as to the best means of disposing of her troublesome self.

When alone with her father Beatrice always behaved prettily. She was very fond of him, although the remembrance of the tears, the text, the distracted vows, when contrasted with his second marriage for nothing but good looks made her look upon him with a little contempt. She

did not know that man is so gregarious a creature that it is not meet for him to live alone. She heard his remarks in silence, then gave him her opinion on the matter.

"I don't want to be a nuisance to you, papa. I am eighteen now—too old to go back to school. It's nonsense, of course, to say I should like to earn my own living, because when I come of age I shall have some money. May I go and live at Fairholme?"

Fairholme was Sir Maingay's seldom-used seat in one of the southern counties.

"But you can't live there alone," he said.

"Yes, I could. Mrs. Williams could take care of me. I shall be happy enough."

"My dear girl, why not be reasonable and make friends with Lady Clauson? Then we could all go abroad together."

Lady Clauson, who was by no means a fool, had by this time found out that she needed something more than mere good looks to go down, or go up, in the society her heart longed for. She had therefore made up her mind to become a travelled woman, and had arranged that Sir Maingay should take her to a variety of foreign countries. The proposed tour was to be an affair of years, and her ladyship had a dim idea of writing or of getting some one else to write a book, describing the well-worn pathways she meant to tread. She hoped to take the world by storm as a literary woman.

"I can't go abroad with you," said Beatrice. "I shall be miserable myself and make you miserable."

"But if you stay in England you must be presented and come out, and all that sort of thing."

"If ever I do get married," said Beatrice drily, "I will be presented as Lady Clauson was, on my marriage."

Sir Maingay's cheek reddened. He was much hurt by the sarcasm. Poor old King Lear found a fitting simile for an ungrateful child, but the sharpness of a sarcastic child is more painful than a whole jawful of serpent's teeth. He did not reply; but the worthy baronet was at his wits' end. What could he do with this girl? He had very few

relations—he cared for none of them. Old Mr. Talbert, of Hazlewood House, was a confirmed invalid; Horace and Herbert were men without homes or wives. Sir Maingay was willing enough that Beatrice should remain in England. He had suffered much during the last few months from the dissensions of his wife and daughter. But where to bestow Beatrice?

At last he remembered an aunt of his own who lived in quiet retirement in one of the suburbs of London. It was of course absurd for Beatrice to think of living at Fairholme, in a half-closed house with a housekeeper and one or two servants. So it was arranged that her great-aunt should take her while Sir Maingay and Lady Clauson were on the Continent. So to Mrs. Erskine's she went, and, as that lady was very old, very deaf, and saw no company, it may be presumed that Miss Clauson had scarcely a merry time of it during her father's absence—an absence which from one reason or another lasted quite four years.

After a while Sir Maingay almost forgot he had a daughter. The Clausons settled down to continental life for an indefinite time. Lady Clauson knew she was improving herself, and, moreover, that Sir Maingay was saving enough money to refurnish the town house from top to bottom whenever they did return to England. In the course of the four years spent abroad Lady Clauson rectified her predecessor's sins of omission, and gave her devoted husband two fine boy-babies. In the revived delights of paternity—a paternity which is so especially dear to middle age—Sir Maingay thought little of the troublesome, obstinate girl he had left in England. His wife and his boys all but turned her out of his heart. So here was Beatrice in the extraordinary position of being a baronet's daughter with scarcely a friend in the world.

At last the Clausons returned to England. Whether her ladyship wrote her book or not is a matter of uncertainty; anyway it was never published. Beatrice made no objection to rejoining the family circle. Her father and his wife found her greatly changed. She was quieter, more reserved, more amenable to reason. It seemed to Sir

Maingay that she had passed her time at Mrs. Erskine's in study. The learning she had acquired almost frightened the baronet ; but he was glad to see she had grown into a beautiful woman, and so he felt quite proud of his neglected daughter, and hoped that things would for the future run smoothly.

His hopes were vain. This time there was no doubt as to with whom the fault lay. A beauty like Lady Clauson could not endure the constant presence of a younger, fresher, and even more beautiful beauty. She was also jealous at the way in which her own children took to Beatrice. Besides, she had never forgiven the girl. Relations soon grew strained, and towards the end of the year Beatrice wrote to her uncles, and asked if they would give her a home.

She was now nearly twenty-three. Having when she came of age succeeded to her late mother's third of old Talbert's possessions, she was independent both by age and by income. She was willing to live at Hazlewood House, if her uncles would take her. If not, she resolved to start an establishment of her own. She was still in her former anomalous position—a baronet's daughter, who had never made a proper entrance into society. As Lady Clauson said, she must have been a wrong-minded young woman, as this omission seemed to trouble her very little.

The Talberts, who liked the little they had seen of their niece, went into solemn conclave on the request. They decided, in the event of Sir Maingay giving his consent—on that point they were most exacting—she might come to them. Sir Maingay raised no objections, so Beatrice Clauson came to Hazlewood House, where since her arrival, about a week ago, she had lived in a state of amused wonder as the amiable peculiarities of the “Tabbies” gradually revealed themselves to her.

She had, of course, intended to make herself useful to her uncles. It may have been the want of some occupation, other than study, which made her turn her eyes to Hazlewood House and the two bachelors. She was no longer a school-girl, so at once broadly hinted that she was

willing to regulate their household matters. The silent horror with which the proposal was received told her at once that her place was to be a sinecure. She saw that her uncles would on no account dream of intrusting their researches into domestic economy to any hands save their own, and the surpassing capability of those hands was deeply impressed upon her when, the day after her arrival, she found Uncle Horace bending over the maid who did the plain sewing, and, in the patientest and gravest way, teaching her the most approved fashion of handling a needle and thread.

After having lived at Hazlewood House for a week, Miss Clauson must have been ready to welcome any event of interest. It is no wonder that, when Horace Talbert, at Mr. Mordle's suggestion, walked into the drawing-room and told his niece what had happened, her curiosity and excitement rose to a high pitch.

"Is it a pretty child?" she asked.

"Wonderfully so. Mordle and Herbert are petting it like a couple of women."

Beatrice did not run at once to see for herself. "What do you mean to do about it, Uncle Horace?" she asked.

"I don't know. I suppose we must keep it till to-morrow and see if the mystery is explained. You had better come out and give us your advice."

Beatrice walked into the hall. The child had made great progress during Horace's absence. The curate was tickling him and making him laugh. Herbert was stroking his bright hair in quite a paternal way. Even the respectable Whittaker was smiling pleasantly.

"What a dear little man!" exclaimed Beatrice, as she walked to the table and looked at the sturdy urchin.

She was the first woman the child had seen since he left his friends at the refreshment-room. Maid-servants, with the curiosity of their sex and kind, had peeped surreptitiously over the balustrade, but had not attracted notice. At such a tender age as his woman is a child's natural protector. He at once quitted his stalwart friends and ran across the table to the fair girl, who smiled and opened her

arms. The little man darted into them, and with a chirrup of delight laid his head on the girl's shoulder and seemed perfectly happy and at rest. He was so pretty that no woman could have refrained from caressing him. Miss Clauson kissed him again and again, then, like every one who came near him, fell to stroking his golden locks and twining them round her fingers. The child's eyes began to close under her soft and soothing touches.

"He must go to bed," said Beatrice decisively.

"Certainly," said Uncle Horace. "Where had he better sleep?"

"Jane has a most comfortable bed," said Herbert.

Jane was the parlour-maid, but Herbert in his housewifely capacity knew the quality of every bed in the house; even the amount of bedding on each. Mr. Mordle turned away. He was afraid of disgracing himself by a burst of ill-timed mirth.

"No, no," exclaimed Beatrice; "he shall sleep with me. Look at him, Uncle Horace: isn't he a perfect cherub?"

"He's a pretty little boy; but we don't know where he comes from, my dear. I hardly think you ought to take a strange infant to sleep with you."

"Oh, nonsense, Uncle Horace! See what a clean, beautiful boy it is. Whittaker, send a large can of hot water to my room. Come, my pet; I will see how I can act the part of a nursemaid."

Singing and crooning and carrying the child in the most approved fashion, Miss Clauson proceeded to bear her prize away.

"You had better look at his linen, Beatrice," said Horace. "It may be marked with his name."

After this the three men went back to the dining-room and talked the curious occurrence over and over.

In about half an hour's time Beatrice reappeared with the intelligence that the boy's clothing bore no mark of any kind. Indeed, it all seemed brand new. She was apparently much delighted with her new toy. She kept running up and down-stairs, to ascertain that her *protégé*

was sleeping the sleep of innocent babyhood. At last she went away altogether.

"Beatrice is more demonstrative than I believed her to be," said Horace regretfully. Herbert echoed the regret, but Mr. Mordle said nothing. He thought the instinctive kindness she showed towards this mysteriously-sent child added another charm to the many he had already discovered in Miss Clauson.

The three men sat together until it was too late to hope that matters would be cleared up that night. No mother, no telegram came. The curate bade his friends good night and walked back to his lodgings in the village, thinking what a charming picture Miss Clauson with the child in her arms made. Poor Mr. Mordle! He had only known Beatrice a week, and was already beginning to dream a foolish dream.

The brothers continued sitting one on either side of the fire. They were not early-to-bed people. Now that they were alone they said little more about the arrival. For three hours they had been discussing every possible theory which might account for the child's appearance among them, so the subject was threadbare, and they sat in silence trying to invent fresh causes. Suddenly a most curious and startling suspicion entered Horace Talbert's mind—a suspicion which now and again made him glance at his brother. Could Herbert by any chance know all about the matter? He had certainly seemed greatly taken with the little boy. Horace remembered how much at home the child had made himself with Herbert. How, when he, Horace, came out of the drawing-room with Beatrice, he had found Herbert stroking and patting the little head. Could there be romantic passages in Herbert's life about which he knew nothing? He pooh-poohed the thought; but it came again and again.

Just after one o'clock, and when the brothers were thinking of retiring, to their great surprise Beatrice reappeared. She was in dainty dressing-gown and slippers. After waiting until Mr. Mordle must certainly have gone she had come down—of course to hear if any news had

arrived. Uncle Horace, with his eyes fixed on Herbert, expressed his conviction that no news was meant to arrive. Beatrice looked musingly into the fire. Her head was bent forward, her hands clasped round one of her knees. She made a pretty, almost classical-looking picture, no doubt duly approved of by those men of taste, her uncles.

"Then what will you do?" she asked at last.

"We will wait until to-morrow, or the day after; then put the matter into the hands of the police," said Horace decisively.

Herbert said nothing, so his brother's suspicions increased. Beatrice rose, as if to say good night. She stood for a while on the rug, apparently intently interested in a series of tiny circles which she was describing with the point of one slipper. Presently she looked up with a flushed cheek and spoke in a quick hurried way.

"If nobody comes for the boy would you mind my keeping him?"

"My dear!" cried Uncle Horace, aghast. "Here?"

She clasped her hands. "Oh, Uncle Horace!" she said, "I have had such a dreary miserable life ever since I was seventeen. I have nothing to do—nothing to live or care for. I could be so happy with that dear child to look after. Come up and see him sleeping. He is the sweetest baby!"

"Such nonsense, Beatrice!" Uncle Horace settled himself into his chair, and showed by the action that a legion of sleeping babies would not induce him to go and look at their slumbering forms.

"Then you come, Uncle Herbert. He is a prettier sight than any of your old masters."

Herbert gave his quiet smile. He was of less stern stuff than Horace—that is, if either of the Talberts could be called stern. He suffered Beatrice to lead him to her room; duly admired the little stranger, then, with his niece, returned to Horace. After this manifestation of weakness Horace's unworthy suspicion was all but certainty.

"You will let me keep him?" pleaded Beatrice. "I am sure you will."

Horace made no reply to her unreasonable request. In their usual dignified manner the two gentlemen made their preparations for shutting up. Beatrice went back to her room.

"She grows very, very impulsive," sighed Horace. This time Herbert said nothing. As he got into bed Horace Talbert told himself that Herbert knew all about the boy; he also told himself that no power on earth should induce him to tax Herbert with this knowledge. A man's private affairs were his own property: he himself had laid down this dogma and must now stick to it; the more so because on a former occasion he had broken with Herbert for six years because the latter had infringed on this rule.

CHAPTER V.

MR. MORDLE MAKES A RASH PROMISE.

THE next morning the Talberts did an unusual thing ; they broke one of their rules by opening their letters before breakfast. They had a time and a place for everything, and their time for reading their correspondence was with their second cups of tea. But so anxious were they to see if their letters contained anything explanatory of last night's occurrence, that the seals were broken at once. They found a couple of invitations to dinner, receipts for payments made two posts ago, the usual amount of circulars, tradesmen's lists, and appeals for charity ; but not a word about the child. Then the kettle was brought, and Herbert set about making the tea. Under some unwritten code of division of labour or honour, the younger brother always presided at the breakfast-table.

Presently Miss Clauson made her appearance with the child on her arm. She had washed him and dressed him, combed his hair into a wavy mass of burnished gold, and so brought him to the breakfast-table fresh and sweet as a rose in June. She placed him on a chair beside her, by the aid of sundry cushions raising him up to a proper level. Having adjusted him to her satisfaction, she ordered bread and milk to be prepared.

The Talberts made no objection to Beatrice's proceedings, although they fancied the child would have been sent to breakfast with the servants. Being anxious to see him by daylight, they screwed their eye-glasses in place, and once more minutely inspected their sturdy little visitor. Even Uncle Horace nodded approval of his bonny looks

and fearless bearing, whilst Herbert joined Beatrice in petting him.

The boy seemed happy enough in his new quarters. It is indeed a sad thing to remark how soon a child forgets its mother. He cries because he misses warmth, food, or comfort—not on account of the absence of the being who has lavished oceans of love upon him.

This particular baby, having been so cruelly deserted, may perhaps be excused for making the best of his changed circumstances, and laughing merrily when called upon so to do; but other babies cannot be absolved from the sin of callous indifference and non-reciprocation of love.

Beatrice having ascertained that no news had arrived, said nothing that bore upon her startling suggestion of last night. Perhaps she saw that the bright saucy child interested and amused her uncles; so, with the diplomatic gifts natural to her sex, judged it better to let the matter rest for a while. As soon as breakfast was over she led the child away, and spent the remainder of the day playing with and petting him to her heart's content. It really seemed as if Miss Clauson had found a new interest in life.

And, to tell the truth, she was a young woman who appeared to want something to arouse her. She was now, at the age of twenty-two, very different from the girl who so hastily threw down the glove to her step-mother. Her quietness and undemonstrative manner, of which the Talberts so much approved, seemed scarcely natural to a girl with beauty, rank, and riches. For, indeed, she was beautiful. If her face showed no colour, its healthy pallor was more attractive to a right-minded man than all the rosy cheeks that ever existed. Her brown hair grew in great masses, and low down on her well-shaped forehead. Her eyes were gray—a strange wonderful gray—so deep in shade that most people would have called her dark-eyed. Her features were perfectly straight. Her face was oval. Her lips were just full enough to make her apathetic demeanour seem inconsistent with the dogmas of physiognomy.

Beatrice Clauson was, in fact, a feminine, toned-down edition of the Talberts. The characteristics which were

with them exaggerated, with her were reproduced in exactly the right proportions. Their faces were elongated ovals—her face was a proper oval. Their noses were straight, but too long—her nose was straight, and just long enough. They were, if anything, too tall—she was only tall enough to be called a fine girl. Miss Clauson's personal appearance was a living proof of how fitting had been the alliance between Sir Maingay Clauson and old Talbert's daughter. The first Lady Clauson had been the counterpart of her brothers. Sir Maingay was short, round-faced, and rather round-bodied. With Beatrice, the blemishes which had detracted from her parents' good looks reappeared as beauties.

Moreover, she had that air of distinction upon the possession of which the Talberts not unjustly prided themselves. They were glad to think it came to her from their side of the family—her father, the baronet, being, like most baronets and other titled personages, a very ordinary-looking man. Ten to one, if you go to a charity ball or other mixed assembly, upon asking the names of the most distinguished-looking men you will find them nobodies. I never inquire now—it is too painful to be told that the noble-presented man who smiles so condescendingly is Mr. Smith, whilst that other insignificant-looking being is Lord This or the Duke of That. It upsets one's cherished ideal as to what the aristocracy should be.

Beatrice Clauson, then, was very fair to see, and had what silly people call a thoroughbred look. Fond as those amiable men, her uncles, were of the girl, she was doubly dear to them because that look was indubitably owing to the Talbert strain of blood in her veins.

This morning she threw books, music, painting, everything aside, and played with her new toy. It was Saturday. The "Tabbies," who invariably went shopping together, were bound to Blacktown to buy groceries. Before starting, Herbert found his way to Beatrice, and asked her if she had any commissions to be executed in the city. He discovered her with flushed face and rumpled hair romping with the child. He watched them with amusement; then,

going upstairs, found after a little search, in one of the attics, some antiquated, battered toys, which five-and-thirty years ago had been dear to Horace and himself. He carried them downstairs, and Beatrice thanked him for the kindly thought and act.

When, in a few hours' time, the brothers drove back with a waggonette full of tea, coffee, sugar, yellow soap, house flannel, Bath stone, emery paper, or whatever else was needful to make the wheels of household management run smoothly, they found Beatrice still engrossed by her charge. They did not say much to her. Saturday was too busy a day to think of anything save the affairs of the house, and as many precious minutes had been wasted in making inquiries at Blacktown station, the brothers were hardly pressed for time—so hardly pressed that when, about four o'clock, the curate called, they sent their apologies by Whittaker, and left their visitor to be entertained by Miss Clauson.

The Rev. Sylvanus Mordle, when he thanked Heaven for the many blessings it had bestowed upon him, always excepted the name he bore from the list. It was, he told himself, a particularly terrible name—doubly so when its owner was a clergyman. He felt it to be provocative of laughter, if not of contempt. Even as a Howard, a Talbot, a Montmorency, or a Plantagenet, is called upon to live up to the great name he bears, Mr. Mordle found it incumbent on himself to endeavour to live away from his singular designation. To counteract the sinister effects of such a name he felt compelled to affect an air of cheerfulness even under the most trying circumstances which fully justify a man's looking lugubrious. He considered his name a great drawback to him in his professional career. The gift which every young clergyman fancies he possesses, of preaching impassioned sermons, was sadly shorn by his name. In this perverted age, when puns are not considered signs of social depravity, Mr. Mordle felt sure that a tear in his eye—even the delivery of a pathetic sermon—would be fatal. The least lachrymose tendency in manner or words would present too great a temptation to be resisted by weak human

nature : in spite of the best intentions, the word "mordling" must suggest itself.

A surname one cannot choose any more than one can choose a dark or a fair skin ; but whilst the curate was willing to allow that the name of Mordle was an unavoidable congenital misfortune, its conjunction with Sylvanus he looked upon as a foul crime, and reviled the godfathers and godmothers who had tacked such a soft-sounding appellation on to Mordle.

On the principle of living it down, he was always brisk and cheery in his manner. It was never too hot, never too cold, never too sunny, never too windy for the Rev. Sylvanus Mordle. He preached almost merry sermons, conveyed in short incisive sentences, rattled out in a quick, decisive, quite-beyond-doubt way. His phrases followed one another like the detonations of a cracker. They seemed designed to slap the listener on the breast, and hammer and hammer away at that sin-hardened receptacle as if meaning by a series of repeated blows to enforce conviction and obedience. They were crisp, strong, muscular exhortations, eminently suited to the spiritual needs of the poorer parishioners. Only when he preached a funeral sermon could Mr. Mordle's style be cavilled at. On such an occasion he was bound to be doubly careful not to get his manner mixed up with his name, so sometimes his discourse did not quite satisfy the bereft relations and grieving friends.

But a funeral sermon was only due to a deceased member of one of the families of position : moreover, Oak-bury is a healthy spot, and when an important death did occur the rector was usually in his place to do his duty. So the Rev. Sylvanus managed very well.

For the rest, he was a man of about thirty, pleasant-looking and popular, not disdainful of the good things of this world, yet not hankering after them—doing the whole work of a curate and three-fourths of that of a rector for one hundred and twenty pounds a year. It was lucky he had a good constitution and a small fortune of his own !

This afternoon Mr. Mordle felt the Talberts' excuses no slight to himself. He begged the brothers might not be

disturbed. He was quite content that Miss Clauson should entertain him *tête-à-tête* as long as possible. He inquired if any news had arrived about the missing mother; then, turning his attention to the child, went through a variety of those little actions which grown-up people, rightly or wrongly, suppose ingratiate children. Noticing how the pretty boy clung to Beatrice, he complimented her on her rapid conquest of his affections—a compliment in which Miss Clauson might have found a deeper meaning lurking had she cared to look for it. He would have called much earlier to learn what had transpired, but had been compelled to attend a funeral several miles off. He alluded to the melancholy reason for his delay with as much cheerfulness as many people mention a wedding.

"And where are your uncles?" he asked.

"In the housekeeper's room," answered Beatrice demurely.

"Busy, of course—Saturday. Bad day to call. What are they about now?"

As he jerked out his short sentences, Beatrice glanced at him and saw his eyes twinkling. She could not help smiling.

"Well—what is it?" asked Mr. Mordle.

The girl gave a little gurgle of laughter. The curate once more repeated his question.

"Oh, Mr. Mordle," said Beatrice, "they are doing the clothes!"

"Quite right; some one must do them. Now, I wonder," he continued, in a more reflective way than usual, "I wonder if they look them out for the wash on Mondays."

"Oh no; not so bad as that. But did you ever know anything so funny!"

"Took you by surprise, of course?" said the curate briskly.

"Yes. I had heard something about it, but the reality overwhelmed me. Uncle Horace doing wool-work was my first experience. The next morning I found Uncle Herbert doling out stores to the cook. And to see them manage the house better than any woman!"

"Delightful. I could tell you some very amusing things, Miss Clauson."

"Please don't. They are so kind and amiable I can't bear to laugh at them."

"They are kind. I love them dearly. What my poor people would do without them I can't think. If they'll leave you enough to do, you're certain to be happy here."

Beatrice smiled. She remembered the horror they had displayed at the bare thought of her having any part in the domestic arrangements of Hazlewood House. It seemed to Mr. Mordle that he had never seen Miss Clauson look so bright and lively as she looked to-day. She looked most lovingly at the child, who, tired of his play, lay peacefully on her lap.

"But I have not enough to do," she said, her hand the while caressing the boy's golden head. "Mr. Mordle, I wish you would help me in something."

"Anything—everything—command me," said the curate in his quickest, most decisive way.

"I have taken such a fancy to this dear little man that, supposing his people do not reveal themselves, I want to persuade my uncles to let me keep him. I could be so happy with him here." She kissed and fondled the boy.

Now that he saw whither his rash promise was to lead him, Mr. Mordle paused and hesitated. "I am sure Uncle Herbert wouldn't mind," added Beatrice.

"Mr. Talbert would never consent," said Mr. Mordle.

"What harm would it do?" asked Beatrice.

The Rev. Sylvanus was silent. He did not like to tell the girl that the retention at Hazlewood House of this mysteriously-sent child might create scandal.

"You will help me, will you not?" pleaded Beatrice. The look in her eyes turned Sylvanus's heart into wax.

So, with the weakness of male humanity when thus assailed, he promised to do what he could to insure her wish being carried out. Beatrice gave him a look of gratitude, the very remembrance of which he felt would repay him for a much greater service than the one she entreated of him. By and by he took his leave of her in that happy

frame of mind peculiar to the man who has laid a lovely woman under an obligation.

Horace and Herbert he did not see. They were detained for an indefinite period. The linen paid in by the laundress did not balance with the counterfoil in the washing-book, so they had to go through it again—an annoying, but a necessary task.

CHAPTER VI.

BEATRICE TRIUMPHANT.

MISS CLAUSON carried her point. Her success was due to a curious combination of events, as well as to her own persistence and eloquent pleading. She managed to get Uncle Herbert alone—a difficult matter, as the “Tabbies” were almost always together—and, after sundry arguments and entreaties, if unable to win his consent to her proposed arrangement, exacted a promise from him that he would not object if Horace approved of her keeping the boy. To be sure he had not the faintest idea that Horace would consent.

Mr. Mordle, the adviser of the family, and Herbert Talbert thus brought on her side or rendered neutral, Horace remained the arbiter of the boy's fate, and Miss Clauson directed all her energies towards making him yield.

Like a clever girl, she took care that the young intruder should be no nuisance to any one, not even to the servants. When her uncles saw him they saw him at his best. At the first signs of bad behaviour Beatrice whipped him away. As he had not yet run amuck through their bric-à-brac, not demolished a ruby-backed plate, or detruncated a Chelsea figure, they had no fault to find with his general behaviour. Indeed, they liked to see the little fellow about the place, and the confiding way in which sometimes he climbed upon Horace's knee was quite touching. He was not a bit afraid of these tall grave men. Children see further in some ways than grown-up people, and no doubt the little boy felt instinctively that many excellent feminine

traits were hidden under the broad bosoms of the stalwart "Tabbies."

They tacitly left his fate in abeyance for more than a week; then Beatrice, who perhaps trembled lest some childish act of mischief might defeat her ends, and who thought that the boy had well done his part in the affair by making himself so easily tolerated, attacked her uncles once more. True to his promise, Herbert said his brother must decide the matter.

"Do you want the child to stay?" asked Horace, turning to the speaker.

"I told Beatrice you should decide."

This answer assured Horace that Herbert knew everything that was to be known.

"My dear Beatrice," he said, "the thing is quite impracticable."

Her mouth quivered. It was clear she had set her heart on keeping her new pet.

"Why is it impracticable? What difference can a child make in a house like this? He will be my sole care."

Uncle Horace looked uneasy. "My dear, you forget it may give rise to scandal."

"Scandal! what scandal?"

Horace grew red. One can't talk plainly to young innocent girls without feeling how bad mankind in general is.

"Hum—ha," he said. "You must remember, Beatrice, we are two single men; not elderly men. As soon as it is known that we have kept the child sent here so strangely, we give a handle to suspicion and scandal. Do you agree with me, Herbert?"

"I am afraid it will be so, Beatrice," said Herbert regretfully.

Miss Clauson drew herself up proudly. It was an action the Talberts always liked to see in the girl, and which had a great effect on them.

"Surely," she said, "you of all people are above suspicion and scandal?"

They were pleased to think this was the truth. They felt that Beatrice was right. What, after all, had scandal to

do with them? The domestic virtues and clockwork regulation of Hazlewood House might defy the breath of the most censorious world. As this great truth came home to him Horace seemed to purr with pleasure.

But he had no intention of yielding. He was for one thing much annoyed with Herbert. Herbert evidently wanted the boy to stay. If so he should say so outright, not let Beatrice fight his battles. So the most Beatrice could get him to promise was that the boy might remain for a few days longer.

In those few days something happened. First of all a piece of gossip went round the neighbourhood and eventually reached the ears of those who were gossiped about—the Talberts. They heard that they were harbouring Lord Hadwynn's eldest son, whose mysterious disappearance had been reported in the papers. Lord Hadwynn was an utter reprobate, and it was well known that his injured wife had smuggled the child out of his way. Lady Hadwynn was an acquaintance of the Talberts; so that even Horace was for a moment staggered when he heard the theory propounded by his neighbours. Then some kind creature wrote to the bereft husband, and his lordship rushed down to Oakbury fierce as a consuming flame—a flame which resolved itself into smoke when he was shown the boy, and found him nothing like his missing son. After this, gossip should have died a natural death, but it did not. People who are determined to swallow a monstrous tale will lick it into the shape they can deal with best. In spite of the Talberts' strenuous denials and plain statement as to how the child was thrown upon their hands, everybody would have it that if not Lord Hadwynn's son, he was some one else's—meaning some one, a nobleman's probably, whose wife had, for private reasons of her own, intrusted him to the Talberts.

Even the reputation of being a harbour of refuge for a duchess or countess in her distress is a flattering thing; and the Talberts, especially Horace, felt pleased while laughing at the absurd idea. Perhaps it was for this reason that Horace at last yielded to his niece's solicitations, and astonished her one day by saying—

"Beatrice, if you really mean to keep that child for a while, we will engage a nurse for it."

She said nothing, but gave Uncle Horace a most grateful kiss. She must have grown wondrously fond of the baby, as her eyes were full of glad tears.

That afternoon she drove into Blacktown, and rigged the child out from head to foot in new and dainty raiment; nothing was too good for him. Horace and Herbert, who knew the price of lace, lawns, and cambrics to a penny a yard, wondered how far her whim was going to carry her. Perhaps they felt rather aggrieved that their aid had not been asked. They dearly loved a little shopping, and could have chosen a trousseau or a layette with any woman under the sun.

But the affair of the nursemaid was peculiarly their own. If the Talberts had one gift of housewifery above another, it was their skill in engaging suitable servants. When they called on a lady for a maid's character, the questions they put were of the most searching and cogent nature. They were not satisfied with the broad assertion that she was sober, honest, and cleanly—they cross-examined until they found out all the weak and strong points in her composition, then engaged her or not as they thought best. Many a confiding young woman, who fancied in going into the service of two rich bachelor gentlemen, she was about to have a grand, lazy, slatternly time of it, found herself grossly deceived. Some even declared they'd rather have twenty mistresses than two such masters. Nevertheless it was a good place, and any girl who had stayed at Hazlewood House a twelvemonth might have had the pick of vacancies in the neighbourhood. To have given satisfaction to the Talberts for so long was a three-volume character.

At last, after a number of interviews with candidates, they found a nurse-girl who came up to the standard of their requirements. One who had no followers, and who made no objection to wearing a cap—moreover, the cap of the pattern they had themselves designed. A member of the Church of England, of course, who promised to communicate every two months, and to be contented with Dorset butter during the winter.

So the mysterious child was as good as adopted at Hazlewood House.

A serious question arose as to whether the infant had ever been christened. Miss Clauson felt sure it had been. The child came to them too well dressed to suppose such an important rite had been omitted. The Rev. Sylvanus, who was known to be disgracefully lax about such matters, did not urge that assurance should be made doubly sure, so no baptismal ceremony took place. After some consultation it was decided that the boy should be known as Henry.

"Henry," said Uncle Horace, "is a safe name; thoroughly adaptable to any station in life."

So Henry it was. The surname they left in abeyance, trusting that time or chance might some day reveal it.

Every article of clothing worn by the child on its arrival was folded up, and together with the direction-card placed in the big safe. They might hereafter be needed for the purposes of identification.

So Beatrice Clauson was confirmed in the possession of her toy—her toy! In a month's time little Harry was every one's toy. The Talberts themselves were ashamed to say how glad they were that Beatrice's whim had been carried out, but it was currently reported that shortly afterwards, when the boy was suffering from some transient childish ailment, the two tall brothers were seen intently poring over that interesting work, Dr. Bull's *Hints to Mothers!* But this, I believe, was scandal.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GREAT JUNE AUDIT.

THE wisest sometimes make mistakes. The most careful housekeeper has been known to spoil a pudding by putting salt instead of sugar on it. Let it then be no detraction from the Talberts' general administrative ability that the nurse-girl turned out badly. They had been so successful with cooks, parlour-maids, house-maids, and kitchen-maids, that their failure in this one instance must not be considered.

The girl's misdeeds need not be detailed, suffice it to say, the culmination of them was this—Horace and Herbert, driving up the lane one evening, saw a young man and woman embracing vigorously and generally having a happy time of it. They could not recognise the girl, but felt sure she was one of their household, so the discreet Whittaker was ordered to wait at the side-door and send the first arrival to his masters.

Of course, she repelled the accusation. She had indeed stepped out for a minute to post a letter to her aged mother, but as for speaking to, much less kissing a man—well, she never did! Alas for feminine veracity! On the back of her print dress was the impression of four fingers and a thumb, printed there in good black mould, for it was an under-gardener who had succumbed to her charms. It was Herbert, who, whilst Horace expostulated, was seated at the table and so saw her back, who drew attention to this damning evidence. This gave rise to impertinence and a month's warning, given in the most dignified and calm way by her masters.

They decided to engage an older and staidier body, and

being perhaps rather crestfallen, allowed Miss Clauson to have a voice in the matter. One morning a quiet-looking, pale-faced woman waited upon them. She heard that a nurse was wanted and offered her services. Character she had none to give, having been out of service for some years; but plenty of people would speak for her respectability. The Talberts were much taken with her general demeanour; but hummed and hawed when they found she did not come red-hot from a place. Horace examined her attentively through his eye-glass.

"Haven't I seen you before?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I lived many years ago with Mr. Merton of Cavendish Square. You were often at the house."

She said her name was Miller, and that she was a widow. She spoke well and in that respectful, but not servile, way which the Talberts liked. If they could bring themselves to get over the absence of credentials, and deny themselves the pleasure of calling on and cross-examining a former mistress, they thought this woman might do.

Beatrice had no doubt about it; and upon such inquiries as could be made being answered satisfactorily, Mrs. Miller was installed in the place of the frail failure whose escapade with the gardener had lowered the whole moral tone of the establishment. A giddy girl in a bachelor's establishment means destruction.

But Mrs. Miller was a very different matter. Miss Clauson found her perfection—nimble-handed, kind, and experienced—moreover, quite qualified to fulfil the duties of lady's-maid when occasion required. Whittaker approved of her. She was a coadjutor after his own respectable heart. The first one to be considered, the boy, took to her as readily as he had taken to Beatrice. Horace and Herbert, in spite of the sharp look-out they kept for a while, could find no flaw in her conduct, and when at the end of two months they ascertained that she had used less soap—four cakes less—than her predecessor had during her short stay—they began to think they had acquired a treasure.

"For the child looks as clean as ever," said Herbert to

Horace. "I always felt sure that girl left the soap in the hot water and forgot all about it."

The last winter months and the spring months passed very quietly at Hazlewood House. The Talberts and their niece dined occasionally with the best families in the neighbourhood, and in return the Talberts asked the best families to dine with them. The seven days' wonder about the boy had almost died away. Every one of course felt sure he was somebody, but no one knew what body. If there was any scandal the serene brothers heard it not. It is true that old Lady Bowker, a very important personage, paid them a visit on purpose to find out all about everything. She had known the Talberts as boys, so felt entitled to ask them point-blank for an explanation. People who have known you as a boy are as a rule great nuisances.

She told them she wanted to speak to them on private business, so Beatrice left the room. Then she turned from one to the other of the grave, long-faced men—

"Now, Horace, now, Herbert, what is the meaning of this affair? Who is the boy you are making such a fuss about?"

"I don't think we ever make fusses," said Herbert, in a deprecating way.

"Certainly not," said Horace, with decision.

"Well, mysteries then—we all want to know who this child really is—the child who came in the dead of night wrapped up in an antimacassar or something—came by Pickford's van, I am told."

"I wish you could tell us, Lady Bowker. • We know no more than you do."

• "That's all nonsense, Horace. I hear you have engaged a nurse, and that the child is to stay with you. I think you are most inconsiderate."

"We are never inconsiderate," said Horace.

"Certainly not," said his brother.

"Yes, you are. • You are inconsiderate in not letting at least one safe discreet person into the secret. Some one like myself who could vouch for you."

"We don't want to be vouched for."

"Yes, you do—I don't see you are any better than other people."

Lady Bowker was growing cross at their mild obstinacy.

"You are most inconsiderate towards Miss Clauson. Here, a week after she comes to live with you, this infant makes its appearance. Of course people say you were only waiting until there was a lady at Hazlewood House to look after him."

"They say that, do they?" asked Horace reflectively.

"What else can they say? I don't say so; but then I have known you so long. I say that you have some excellent reason for keeping this child; but you ought to tell one person at least who he really is."

"But we don't know."

"Yes, you do. Now tell me, like good men."

They repeated their simple statement, adding that the child was kept by Beatrice's express wish; also because they hoped the mystery would one day be solved; and because they themselves felt a friendly disposition towards the little waif.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Lady Bowker rudely, and rising to go. The brothers smiled calmly.

"You will only have yourselves to blame for the scandal," continued their visitor. Still they smiled.

"Dear Lady Bowker," said Horace softly, "will you still ask us to dinner occasionally?"

"Of course I shall."

"And still honour Hazlewood House with your presence?"

"Yes—when you ask me."

"Then," said Horace, "we feel we can hold our own against the world."

Lady Bowker drove away in a thorough bad temper; but feeling more certain than ever that the child was somebody. Indeed, she managed to convey to most people the impression that she was in the secret. •

"Lady Bowker is a trifle vulgar sometimes," said Horace sadly.

"She is," assented Herbert.

It was a painful thing for them to be compelled to make such an accusation against a well-known member of the aristocracy; but they were conscientious men, and spoke the truth even when it lacerated their feelings.

Then in a quiet methodical manner they went to work and dusted all the Oriental china in a large cabinet on the first landing. They were fond of Oriental china, which they considered the aristocrat of ceramics.

It is of course a proud position for a man to hold when he feels he can defy the scandal of a place like Oakbury, but nevertheless Horace Talbert was much annoyed, and as week after week went by this annoyance increased. He thought that Herbert should have spoken to him. He had waived his objections to keeping the child at Hazlewood House, and now that the matter was settled, Herbert ought to have told him everything. Faithful to his creed of non-interference, he said or showed nothing of the state of his mind until the great June audit came round.

The great June audit was this. We have seen how exactly just the brothers were towards one another in the matter of pounds, shillings, and pence, so it will be easily understood that the accounts were kept with the most clerkly correctness. Horace was the paymaster, and every item of expenditure was duly entered in an account-book—his long, elegant handwriting looking quite out of place when used for such base purposes. If the accounts were not kept by the Italian system of double entry, they were couched in a form which was perfectly intelligible. After all, there must have been a strong strain of trading blood in the Talberts. If one of them kept a horse more than the other it was charged to his account. If one was ill, and a doctor's bill came in consequence, he was debited with the amount. Tradesmen's accounts were dissected and charged off to the proper parties, and, as soon as possible after the 30th of June, Horace prepared an elaborate statement of affairs, which the two men checked through, signed, and settled up, whatever amount was due from one to the other. Nothing could have been fairer.

But this year, when the accounts were submitted to his

inspection, Herbert Talbert opened his eyes in astonishment at one item with which he was charged. "I don't understand this," he said, laying his finger on one amount which stood against him. Horace, without looking, knew what it was. He had weighed the matter carefully before he made that particular entry.

"I think I have charged it as low as in justice I could," he said.

"But why is it charged at all?" asked Herbert, raising his eyebrows.

Now the entry was: Wages of nurse, six months, £9 10s. *od.*; estimated keep of nurse and child for six months, say £27 16s. *od.*; total, £37 6s. *od.*

"I thought," said Horace slowly—"in fact your manner at various times gave me to understand—that it was right and just I should make this entry."

Herbert's face grew red. He was as nearly in a rage as he had ever been in his life. Yet he answered not in words. He took a quill pen, and drew a thick ink line through the entry, thereby giving Horace a morning's work in re-copying his elaborate statement, and altering the totals.

Nothing more was said. Herbert's manner of denial was more emphatic than words. His brother knew that he would never have disputed a sixpence which he was justly liable to pay. Horace did not apologise for his suspicion; he felt that having allowed Herbert to blot and mutilate his fair balance-sheet without a word of protest was more than enough compensation, and no doubt Herbert thought the same, for peace was restored, and the matter never again mentioned.

The consequence was that, after the June audit, even Horace was unable to frame any theory to account for the way in which the boy had appeared among them. He felt, moreover, he had been rather taken in—that his consent to the child's remaining had been won under false pretences, or rather because he had deceived himself. However, it was now too late to alter the course of events, and, to tell the truth, Horace Talbert in his own grave,

solemn way petted the child almost as much as Beatrice did.

About this time the Rev. Sylvanus Mordle made a great resolve. Months ago he had come to the conclusion that Miss Clauson's gray eyes and classical face had wrought havoc with his heart. The M.B. waistcoat which covered it—Sylvanus was orthodox at least in his attire—might have been of wet tissue paper for the little protection it had afforded him. He had not until now met the woman he wished to make his wife, although his single state was in no wise due to any views as to the peculiar fitness of celibacy for the priesthood. Such iniquitous doctrines he scouted, as they deserve to be scouted, by all who owe anything to the fierce, brave, vulgar, coarse, and truly human reformer who boldly asserted that comforts of married life were not superfluous luxuries. After Miss Clauson had been at Hazlewood House for a month, the curate knew that a crisis in his fate was approaching. He slapped himself heartily on his broad chest, and told the Rev. Sylvanus Mordle that here at last was the one maid for him.

This, so far as it went, was eminently satisfactory. Unluckily, or luckily, there are two parties to every bargain, two sides to every hedge, and the curate felt that the hedge between himself and Miss Clauson was a high one.

Nevertheless, like a bold man, he went to work to climb it or break through it. It was, indeed, high time he took some action in the matter. Under the present circumstances, he found his enforced habit of appearing cheerful to all, even himself, becoming a great strain upon his resources. There were times when he felt tempted to seek some secluded corner of his parish, and sigh dolefully beneath its famous oaks. Times when, in his own words, he felt inclined to go out and bay the moon, or generally do what is consoling to unsettled lovers.

All this and more for the sake of Beatrice Clauson's gray eyes, brown hair, and straight profile! The Rev. Sylvanus was indeed in a bad way, and knew he should

not be his own man again until his love was crowned, or kicked into the gutter.

So one Sunday evening he preached a crisp, exhilarating, detonating sermon, in which he showed his parishioners how right it was that man should choose a helpmeet. He preached it really to encourage himself, but its immediate effect upon his flock was that on the next Sunday the banns of marriage between no less than three couples were called; so it must have been a most convincing discourse.

On the Monday he mounted his tricycle, and, after going his parochial round, drove or propelled himself on tremulous wheels to Hazlewood House.

Sylvanus, on his tricycle, was a lovely sight, but one which, upon its first introduction, filled Oakbury with consternation. To see a clergyman, in a long black coat and broad-brimmed hat, working vigorously with muscular legs, and sending himself along at the rate of ten miles an hour, was an upheaval of all traditions. Only his popularity saved him. Indeed, old Mrs. Pierrepont, a parishioner in a chronic state of aggrievedness, wrote to the bishop on the subject. She called it a "bicycle-machine," not exaggerating, but diminishing, so far as wheels went. The bishop was startled. A curate careering about the country on a couple of wheels did seem out of place. So his lordship wrote to the rector of Oakbury on the subject, and the rector handed the letter to Sylvanus. So far as he, the rector, was concerned, his curate might have flown about on a broomstick if by so doing he kept the bother of the parish off his superior's hands.

Mr. Mordle, who was unable to see that his ordination vows debarred him from using such a convenient vehicle for getting from one end of the parish to another, did a bold thing. Knowing that the bishop was staying at a country house some twenty-five miles away, he threw himself early one morning into the saddle or the seat, and used his nether limbs to such purpose that just before lunch-time his card was sent in to his lordship, and in ten minutes the bishop was gravely inspecting what Mrs.

Pierrepont, when speaking to her friends, called a diabolical machine.

For some minutes the bishop stood on the doorsteps, weighing the innocence or guilt of the inanimate creature at his feet, Sylvanus the while pleading its cause with his usual brisk vehemence and jerky dexterity. He expatiated on the size of his parish, and on the wonderful assistance he derived from this modern invention for getting quickly over the ground. He showed his lordship the convenient little bag attached to the back, in which he carried his books of devotion, or, when occasion needed, some small creature comfort for the aged sick. He explained the action of the machine, and so raised the episcopal curiosity that an unheard-of thing occurred. His lordship, gaiters and all, gravely installed himself in the seat, and, to the unutterable delight of several ladies and gentlemen who were gazing through the drawing-room windows, in a quiet, dignified, leisurely way, as behoves a bishop, actually propelled his sacred self down the gravel path and up again, with no further damage than cutting up the edges of his host's lawn, and knocking a couple of stones out of a rockery. The tricycle triumphed! Although the bishop did not embody an eulogistic notice of it in his next charge to his clergy, he has been known, on several occasions, to recommend its use in outlying districts.

Like many other useful innovations, Sylvanus and his tricycle lived down prejudice, and were able to accompany each other to Hazlewood House this particular afternoon in July.

The "Tabbies" had driven into Blacktown; but Miss Clauson was in the back garden. Sylvanus pulled his tricycle aside, so that it should be out of the way of other callers; then went to meet what fate had in store for him. Poor fellow, he breathed a prayer as he crossed the lawn. He had really very little hope; but he felt he must make his confession before he struck his flag altogether.

It was a warm July afternoon. Beatrice, in a dainty white dress, looked deliciously cool as she sat reading in the shade of a sycamore tree. She smiled pleasantly when

she saw her visitor approaching. Sylvanus would have given all he possessed to have seen her eyes drop shyly—to have noticed a blush rise to her cool white cheek. Mrs. Miller, the nurse, sat with the little boy on her lap some short distance off.

After the first greeting, Sylvanus fetched one of those comfortable carpet-seated chairs, several of which were scattered about, and sat beside Beatrice. They talked for a while on ordinary subjects; then, like a man, the curate resolved to come to the point.

"I wish to say a few words to you alone, Miss Clauson. Will you walk into the house or the other garden with me?"

She looked surprised, perhaps troubled. "We can speak here," she said, telling the nurse to take the child indoors. She kissed the little man tenderly as he was led away.

"You are very fond of the child," said Sylvanus.

"Very, very fond of him." Then she turned her clear gray eyes upon him as one who waited for a promised communication. He knew all was lost—or rather nothing had been his to lose. But he went on to the bitter end.

"Miss Clauson—Beatrice—" he said, "I have come to-day to ask you if you could love me—if you will be my wife?"

She did not answer. He fancied he heard her sigh; yet that sigh gave him no hope.

"That I love you, I need not say. You must have seen that. In my own clumsy fashion I must have shown it."

"I feared it was so," said Beatrice dreamily.

"Yes, it was, always will be so. Even as I speak, I speak with little hope; but at least you will hear and believe. I love you."

His voice was so deep and earnest she scarcely recognised it. He looked at her. Her lashes were cast down and tears were forcing their way through them.

"Will you answer me?" he said tenderly. "I do not insult you by speaking of wealth or rank in the world. If you loved a man you would care little for that. You would marry the man you loved in spite of all the world."

She shivered. Her mouth worked piteously. For a second a wild joyful thought ran through the wooer's mind—for a second only.

"Do I judge you rightly?" he asked.

"I think so—but, oh, Mr. Mordle, I am so sorry for this."

Her accent left no doubt as to the genuineness of her regret. Had she wronged him to the greatest extent, it could not have been more real.

So like a man he took his answer. He rose. His face was pale, but then, a man's face is, so far as colour goes, beyond his control. But his manner and words were his own bond-servants.

"We can still be friends?" he jerked out in a very good imitation of his usual brisk manner.

"If you wish it," said Beatrice quietly, almost humbly.

"Of course I wish it. By the bye, will you wish me a pleasant holiday? I am going away next week. France, Switzerland, Rhine—all the rest of it."

Beatrice laid her hand on his arm. "Don't, please, speak like that; you make me miserable."

"Miserable!"

"Yes. Do you think a woman does not feel unhappy when she finds she cannot accept the love of a good man like yourself? Do you think she believes he goes from her side and forgets all that has happened? I don't think I am to blame, Mr. Mordle, but anyway I feel miserable."

He took her hand. "No, you are not to blame. I was a fool. Never mind, I am a man also. I really was going away next week, unless—well, never mind what. When I come back, if I am not cured of my folly, I can at least promise that even you will not see any symptoms of disease. Good-bye."

He turned and left her. Even in his desolation he had the grain of comfort that he had not borne himself amiss. To Miss Clauson, at least, he must always stand far above his unfortunate name.

Still he was terribly upset. So much so that he walked to the end of the lane without remembering his tricycle,

and was compelled to retrace his steps in order to recover his artificial means of propulsion. He felt this to be a peculiarly unfortunate incident, for, as he walked up to the house, he caught a glimpse of Beatrice standing in a pensive, thoughtful attitude, gazing out of one of the windows. Nevertheless he mounted his metal steed bravely and sped away.

By the unwritten canons of art, it seems to me that a rejected suitor is expected, if a horseman, to dash his spurs into his charger's flanks and gallop away, anywhere, anywhere!—if a pedestrian he should rush off in a frenzy, stride off with dignity, or lounge away with studied carelessness. The Rev. Sylvanus's manner of departure was certainly an impertinent invasion of comedy into the grim realms of tragedy. But in real life the two are always inextricably mingled. Only in romances do we find them kept quite apart. This is not a romance.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. MILLER TAKES A HOLIDAY.

MRS. MILLER, the respectable middle-aged widow who had, in spite of her lack of properly authenticated service-testimonials, been installed in the place vacated by the nurse-girl whose amorous tendencies sent such a thrill through Hazlewood House, continued to give the greatest satisfaction. She was a living proof that a broom which swept clean when new may continue to do so after the newness has departed. Moreover, Mrs. Miller was a broom which raised very little dust as it swept.

She was a pale-faced woman with strongly-marked features. The nose was aquiline, the cheeks thin, almost hollow; the mouth and chin told of a certain force of character, the eyes were dark, and at times shone with peculiar brightness. In spite of the calm, methodical way in which she went about the place in discharge of her duties, one skilled in the study of the face would have said that this woman possessed a highly nervous temperament—that her quiet was but the result of years of self-control, that had she lacked that strong mouth and chin, Mrs. Miller's true nature would have shown itself at every hour of the day. •

She was thin, and in the dark gowns which she invariably wore, looked almost ascetic. To men she presented few attractions. The under-gardener, who had been reprimanded, but not dismissed, found the change of nurses a sorry one for him. Had he wished to do so, I doubt if the most forward man-servant would have dared to put his arm round Mrs. Miller's sombre waist.

But her masters liked her, Miss Clauson liked her, the boy liked her, and, above all, Whittaker liked her. This last was an important matter, as in the servants' hall Whittaker, by virtue of long service and irreproachable character, reigned supreme.

The new nurse was in many ways a servant after his own heart. She treated him with the respect which was his due, and neither by word nor action ridiculed his masters—the crime common to nearly all the retainers of Hazlewood House. The only fault which Whittaker could find with Mrs. Miller was on account of her religious sentiments.

For Whittaker was an intelligent man, who in his hours of leisure improved his mind. For theology he read good old-fashioned, one-sided works which proved beyond doubt that through the porch of the parish church lay the only road to heaven. Every one knows that it is delightful to give a new-comer the benefit of one's own religious tenets—to point out where one is right and the other wrong. It was but natural that in a kindly paternal way Whittaker should take an early opportunity of ascertaining Mrs. Miller's orthodoxy.

He did this in the butler's pantry, whither she had one day come on some errand. It was on a Monday, and Whittaker began by commenting on Mr. Mordle's sermon of the preceding night. He little guessed what a storm his words would raise—how by sheer accident he had stumbled on a way of turning this calm-looking woman into a wild enthusiast. But he had, in fact, struck the fire from the flint.

She forgot all about her errand, and entered into religious discussion in a way that took the male disputant's breath from him. She talked about selection and predestination—the utter inefficacy of works or faith to save—she pounded him with terrible texts which cut off the hope of mercy from all save the elect, until poor old Whittaker fairly gasped. His one-sided studies furnished no weapons with which to meet her vehement attack. All he could do was to shake his head pityingly and sigh for the state of her

mind. In this he was little different from many reputed teachers of men.

Suddenly, as if remembering where she was, Mrs. Miller grew calm; but evidently by a great effort of self-control. She even apologised for her excitement, which she hoped Mr. Whittaker would forget. Then she left him.

In his responsible position his first thought was that his masters ought to be informed of the heterodox views held by the nurse. But this seemed scarcely fair to the woman, who, in spite of all, went to church as regularly as the other servants. So he did not mention the matter to the Talberts, but, overtaking Mr. Mordle as the latter was one day walking into the town, he, with all respect, told him what strange ideas Mrs. Miller held on religious subjects. This may seem presumption on Whittaker's part, but the truth is, that the dream of his life was, that had not fate made him a butler he might have been a clergyman. And a very imposing one he would doubtless have made.

"Ah!" said Mordle. "Calvinism—dreary religion—most dismal and dreary of all."

The curate was rather short with Whittaker. He thought the old servant rather a nuisance and somewhat of a prig.

"Will you see her and talk to her, sir?" asked Whittaker respectfully.

"No—Calvinists are incurable. But to please you, Whittaker, I'll preach at her some Sunday."

It may be presumed that Mrs. Miller did not inflict her Calvinism upon Beatrice, as the latter seemed to find the new nurse perfectly suited to her duties. It was clear that Mrs. Miller had become strangely attached to her young mistress. Nothing seemed to give her such pleasure as performing any small personal service which Miss Clauson required. When Beatrice passed her, the woman's dark eyes followed her with an expression of almost dog-like affection. On her part Beatrice treated the nurse with a consideration not always shown by the most amiable towards their servants. It was vulgarly said among the household that Mrs. Miller, quiet as she was, had managed to get the length of Miss Clauson's foot.

Whether Mrs. Miller was unduly favoured or not, things at Hazlewood House ran on smoothly. Perhaps it was the perfect order in which the gear worked that induced the nurse to take a day's holiday.

It was the day after Mr. Mordle had made and lost his venture. Horace and Herbert, pottering about the gardens, saw the bright-haired boy going out in charge of the parlour-maid. This was an infraction of rules which could not be overlooked. They demanded the cause, and were told that Mrs. Miller had gone for a day's holiday.

Of course the brothers said no more, but upon seeing Beatrice they mentioned the matter to her. "Yes," she said. "I told her she might go for the day."

The Talberts were too polite to blame Beatrice in words, but a slight elevation of four eyebrows showed their owners' discontent. Beatrice, in giving a servant a holiday, had taken a liberty.

"Where has she gone?" asked Herbert, who liked to know that his servants were spending their time properly.

"To London, I suppose," said Beatrice carelessly.

Now the way in which Mrs. Miller spent her holiday was as follows:—

She rose at an early hour and walked from Hazlewood House to the cross roads. Here she waited until the lumbering old-fashioned 'bus came in sight. She took a seat in it, and was in due time deposited at the Blacktown station. At Blacktown she took the train to Weymouth, which fashionable watering-place she reached about eleven o'clock.

It was, however, clear that she had not come here to enjoy a day at the seaside. Instead of going at once to the gay esplanade, she sought the shades of the general waiting-room—here she remained an hour.

She then embarked in another train; one that ran on a single line of railway—ran nearly the whole of its way with the sea on one side, and a mighty hill of smooth, rounded pebbles, known as the Chesil Beach, on the other, whilst in front of it loomed tall, serrated, precipitous cliffs, at the foot of which was its destination.

Mrs. Miller paid no attention to the natural scenery of the place. She stepped from the train and walked out of the little station in a methodical, business-like way. It was evident that the woman had not come so far on a mere pleasure jaunt.

It was a burning day. The sun shot down its rays fiercely on the treeless, shadeless, barren island, or so-called island. Mrs. Miller's black garments seemed scarcely suitable to such weather—her frame certainly not strong enough to toil up those cliffs of oolitic limestone which frowned down upon her. No wonder she turned to the cab-stand. The two or three cabs which it boasted were rickety old machines, but the horses which were between the shafts were strong ones. Horses need be strong to earn a living in this land.

She drove a bargain after the manner of her kind, then took her seat in one of the dusty vehicles. She was driven through the little gray town which lies at the foot of, and stretches a long way up the hill. The horse toiled up the steep street: on and on until the occupant of the cab looked down on the tops of the houses which she had just passed. Then a turn, and a bit of level ground, another turn, and a steep hill; so on and on in a zigzag course until the table-land which lies at the top of Portland Island was somehow reached, an event which must have been grateful alike to the horse and the occupant of the cab, supposing the latter only possessed of nerves of ordinary strength, and therefore apt to rebel against being drawn up hills as steep as the side of a house. •

Some time before the cab reached the top of the cliffs it had at intervals passed gangs of men working by the roadside. At a distance these men looked little different from ordinary navvies, but a closer inspection showed that the garments of most of them consisted of a dark yellow jersey covered by a sleeveless jacket of light fustian or some such material. This jacket, moreover, was stamped in various places with the Government broad arrow. Every man wore gaiters and a curiously-shaped cap, under which no hair was visible. Occasionally one might be seen who

moved with a certain stiffness in his gait, as if something which he would willingly have dispensed with restrained the natural elasticity of his lower limbs. Here and there the monotony of the attire was broken by the appearance of some who were dressed in blue instead of yellow; but, taken altogether, the dress, if comfortable and enduring, was scarcely one which a man being a free agent would choose for himself.

The gangs which Mrs. Miller passed on the roadside were for the most part engaged in handing lumps of turf from man to man. They performed these duties in a listless, perfunctory manner, although standing on the hillside above every band of workers were two men in long dark coats with the shining buttons of authority, and each of these men held a rifle with fixed bayonet.

Farther away in the quarries could be seen many other such gangs, digging, delving, hauling, wheeling barrows, and performing other operations needful for extracting the famed Portland stone from the ground.

After passing various sentries, and driving for some distance along the level ground, Mrs. Miller's cab reached a beautiful, tall, buttressed wall; skirting this, it turned at right angles and very soon drew up before an imposing entrance built of gray stone, and bearing over the archway the royal arms of England. This was the entrance to Her Majesty's prison of Portland.

In front of it, across the road, stretched the governor's garden, still brilliant with flowers, and looking like a glorious oasis in the midst of a barren land. A man who in discharge of his duties has to live on the top of Portland Island wants a garden or something of that sort. Without it the monotony of the place would drive him mad.

But Mrs. Miller did not even look at the gay beds. She dismounted, and after telling the cabman to wait for her, walked boldly through the prison gate.

She was immediately accosted by a portly, good-tempered-looking janitor, whose gold-laced cap spoke of superior standing. He ushered her into a little waiting-room just inside the gate, and asked her to state her business. Mrs.

Miller's business was to see one of the convicts, by name Maurice Harvey.

Now, convicts are only allowed to see their friends once in six months; so the janitor shook his head dubiously. Still, as Mrs. Miller was a most respectable-looking woman, he said he would mention the matter to the governor. He begged the lady to take a chair and then left her.

She sat for some time in the bare little waiting-room, the walls of which were decorated with notices requesting visitors to the prison not to offer the warders any money, but to deposit such donations as they wished to make in boxes which were hung against the wall for the benefit of discharged prisoners and the officers' schools respectively. After a while the good-natured janitor returned. He told Mrs. Miller that the convict had not seen a friend for many months, so upon his return from work he would be asked if he would like to see her. She must give her name.

She wrote it down; then waited patiently. By and by there was a measured tramp of many heavy feet, and she knew the convicts were returning to dinner. After the tramp had died away, a warder made his appearance and told her to follow him.

It was but a step. He opened a door in the rear of the waiting-room, and Mrs. Miller found herself in a place which could suggest nothing else than a den at a zoological garden, one side of the room being formed of iron bars about six inches apart. And opposite was a similar den with its front turned towards it and entered by another door, and between the two was a space, a narrow den, entered by another door and containing a stool.

Presently the door of the middle den opened and a warder entered and seated himself upon the stool: then the farthest door opened, and one of the blue-habited convicts walked up to the bars, and gave his visitor a nod of careless recognition.

As a rule, when a female friend is permitted to see a convict there is weeping and wailing. Hands are stretched out through the bars across the open space, and if the two persons are of ordinary stature, finger-tips may just meet.

This is better than nothing. Time was when no open space divided the friends; they could kiss and almost embrace through one set of bars. But it was found that the visitor's kiss often transferred a half-sovereign from her mouth to the convict's. A kindly action, no doubt, but one which when discovered led the man into trouble, knocked off good-conduct marks, and lengthened his time of imprisonment. So now there is a space of something like five feet between the visitor and the visited.

With these two there was no weeping, no stretching out of hands. In fact, as Mrs. Miller looked at the caged creature in front of her, an expression very nearly akin to hatred settled on her strongly-marked features. Yet, in spite of his close-clipped crown, shaven cheeks, and ugly attire, the convict was by no means ill-looking. His features were straight, and might even have been called refined. He was above the middle height, broad-shouldered, and healthy-looking. His teeth were good, and his hands, although rough and hardened with toil, were not the hands of one who has laboured from his childhood. His eyes had a cruel, crafty look in them; but this look might have been acquired since his incarceration. Indeed, Mrs. Miller had noticed the same expression in the eyes of every convict whom she had met on the road to the prison.

Mrs. Miller looked through her bars at the convict; the convict looked through his bars at Mrs. Miller; the warder between them sat on his stool sublimely indifferent, and for a while there was silence. The convict was the first to break it.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said.

"Yes, it's me," said Mrs. Miller.

"Well, what do you want? To see how I am getting on?"

He spoke quite jauntily. His visitor gazed at him scornfully.

"Oh, I'm in splendid health," he continued. "Physically, I'm twice the man I was when I came here. Regular hours, regular meals, regular work. Constitution quite set up. No chance of my dying before my term's up."

"No, I'm afraid there isn't," said Mrs. Miller with such bitterness that the impassive warder glanced at her, and wondered what manner of prisoner's friend this was.

The prisoner's face changed. He scowled at her as darkly as she had scowled at him.

"When will your time be up?" she asked sharply. "Can you tell me?" she added, turning to the warder.

"Can't say exactly," answered the warder. "He's in blue, so he's in his last year."

Mrs. Miller shuddered. Her hands clenched themselves involuntarily.

"I want to know," she said, addressing the convict, "what arrangements you will be willing to make when you come out. That is the object of my visit."

The man looked at her mockingly. "I have thought of nothing as yet," he said, "except the joy I shall feel at once more returning to the arms of my devoted wife."

The woman's dark eyes blazed. She leant her face against the bars, and glared at the shaven face before her. "How much money do you want?" she whispered.

The convict shrugged his uninteresting-looking shoulders. "Money is an after consideration—I am pining for conjugal felicity."

She turned and paced the narrow space. The warder grew quite interested in the interview. As a rule his duties were very monotonous. He recognised the fact that the present conversation was out of the ordinary run. The woman seemed to have forgotten his presence. She stamped her foot, and turned fiercely to the convict.

"Look here," she said; "will you go to America, Australia, anywhere? Money will be found."

"Certainly not," said the polite convict. "Besides, sir," he added, turning to the warder with an assumed air of deference, "I believe it is a *sine quâ non*—I mean it is indispensable—that for some time I must report myself to the police once a month?"

The warder nodded.

"God help us!" murmured the woman. Then turning to the convict, she said—

"You'll let me know when you are released?"

"Oh yes. I'll let you know fast enough. You'll be one of the first I shall come and see. Now, if you've nothing more to say, I'll ask to be taken back to my dinner. Good and plentiful as the fare is, I like it warm better than cold."

The stolid warder could not help smiling. The time usually allotted for an interview with a prisoner had by no means expired. It was a new experience to find a convict of his own free will curtailing his privilege. He turned inquiringly to Mrs. Miller.

"Got anything more to say to him?" he asked.

"No," she answered sullenly. The convict made her a polite bow as she turned and walked to the door of her own den. She stood outside on the gravel for a moment, and gazed moodily after No. 1080 as he was conducted by his guardian across the open space and vanished from sight round the chapel on the way to his own cell. Then she entered the waiting-room, where she found the civil official who had at first accosted her.

From him she ascertained the proper office at which the inquiry she wanted answered should be made; and upon applying there learnt that No. 1080, supposing he continued to conduct himself as he had hitherto done—that is, earning the maximum of eight good marks a day—would obtain his ticket-of-leave in about six months' time.

"Then what becomes of him?" she asked. "Do you just put him outside the gate, and tell him to be off?"

The officer smiled. "Oh dear, no. He is asked if he has any friends to go to, or where he wants to go to. His fare is paid to that place. He is given a suit of clothes and a little money. After that he must do the best he can."

Mrs. Miller looked thoughtful. "Is there any one I could write to and ask to be told the day he will come out?" she asked.

"Certainly. If you are a relation or friend, and willing to look after him, and wrote to the governor to that effect, no doubt you would hear from him."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Miller. Then she gathered up

her black skirts and left the prison. She found her cab, and was driven back to the railway station. It was some time before a train left for Weymouth; so she climbed to the top of the Chesil Beach, and sat down gazing out over the sea. Her lips moved, although the rest of her body was motionless. She was praying, and the petition she offered up was that Heaven in its mercy would remove from earth a certain convict before the day came upon which he would be entitled to demand his freedom. A curious prayer for a religious woman to make, but after all not stranger than the prayers offered up by antagonistic armies.

The train started at last, and took her to Weymouth. Here she obtained refreshment, of which, indeed, she stood much in need. Somehow she made a mistake in the time, and missed the afternoon train. The consequence was that it was past eleven o'clock when she rang the bell of that methodically-conducted establishment, Hazlewood House. And the rule of Hazlewood House was that no servant should on any pretence be out of doors after half-past nine, or, unless the presence of company demanded it, out of bed after half-past ten.

Her masters were in waiting, and at once took her to task. She explained that she had missed the train.

"What train?" asked Horace.

"The train from Weymouth, sir."

"But Miss Clauson told us you were gone to London."

"Miss Clauson made a mistake, sir."

Horace felt nettled at the idea of any one who held even a vicarious authority from himself making a mistake. So he said, with some asperity, "This must not occur again, Mrs. Miller."

"And," added Herbert, "the next time you want a holiday kindly mention the fact to us as well as to Miss Clauson. We have a rule in these matters."

Mrs. Miller curtsied, and left the room.

"She is a curious-looking woman," said Horace. "I wonder if we were right in taking her without a character?"

CHAPTER IX.

JUMPING AT CONCLUSIONS.

MR. Mordle went away the next week. He carried his sorrow with him, manfully resolved to do all he could to leave it on the summit of Mont Blanc or the Matterhorn, to sink it in the Lake of Maggiore or Como, or to cast it upon the flowing Rhine. He told himself with such cheerfulness as he could muster that he was deeply wounded but not killed. Before he tied the label on his portmanteau he discharged what his keen sense of honour told him was a duty. He called on the Talberts and informed them how he had fared with Beatrice.

They were very busy bottling off a quarter cask of sherry. They found that buying their wine in wood saved them Heaven knows how much. Now, bottling wine is a nice, dignified, yet, withal, cheerful operation, in the performance of which a duke need not be ashamed to be seen. If I had the wine to bottle I would work at it ten hours a day. So when the brothers heard that Mr. Mordle wished particularly to see them, he was asked to step down into the cellar.

Into the cellar he went. Not a bad place on such a sultry day. He found Horace seated on a low stool with his long straight legs spread out on either side of the cask, in something of the attitude of a reversed Bacchus. He was filling the bottles with the golden fluid, whilst Herbert stood near him, and after dipping the corks into a little basin full of wine manipulated them with a cork-squeezer, and eventually drove them into their resting-place by aid of a small spade-shaped mallet. As each bottle was filled,

corked, and put aside, Herbert made a chalk mark on a board, and every fourth mark he crossed with another, so that the tally could be easily counted. The whole performance was beautifully methodical and business-like, reflecting great credit on the actors.

With their native politeness, the moment Mr. Mordle came in sight they ceased their occupation. Horace turned the tap and rose from the half-filled bottle, Herbert left the cork half-driven in. They greeted their visitor and apologised for bringing him down to the lower regions. Although they wore large coarse white aprons fashioned somewhat like a girl's pinafore, they looked two well-bred gentlemen.

"I say," said the curate nervously, "you know I'm off the day after to-morrow."

"Yes. We wish you a pleasant trip."

"Thanks. Sure to enjoy myself. I want to tell you something before I go." They begged him to speak. They thought it was some petty parish matter on his mind.

"Do you mind taking off your aprons for a minute? Somehow my news doesn't seem to fit in with them."

Mr. Mordle was a privileged person. He could say and do what few others could. Moreover, his manner showed them he had something of importance to communicate.

Without a word they untied their pinafores, folded them up, and laid them across the sherry cask.

"Shall we go upstairs?" asked Horace. •

"Oh dear, no. This will do capitally. What I want to tell you is this. Last week I asked Miss Clauson to marry me. •She refused. Thought you ought to know."

Horace looked at Herbert; Herbert looked at Horace. They stroked their beards meditatively, but for some time neither spoke.

"Well," said Mr. Mordle, "that's all."

"I think, Mordle," said Horace sadly, "you should have consulted us first."

"Quite so," said Herbert.

"Don't see it at all. Miss Clauson is of age. But it doesn't matter—I tell you now."

The brothers shook their heads gravely.

"I tell you," said Sylvanus, "because I'm going away to cure myself. When I come back I should like to be able to visit you as before. You needn't be afraid."

"Miss Clauson must decide," said Horace.

"Exactly so," said Herbert.

So the matter was left, and Mr. Mordle went away on his hard-earned holiday with a clear conscience if a heavy heart.

The brothers returned to their fascinating occupation, and worked away for some time in silence. Three dozen of sherry must have been bottled before Horace spoke.

"It is time Beatrice was married."

"Yes," said his brother; "but she isn't a marrying girl. She takes after us, I think."

There was always a comfort in this reflection; especially now, when the fame of Miss Clauson's good looks had spread through half Westshire.

It was indeed time that a suitable suitor made his appearance. The chances were that in a year or two the girl might fall into her uncles' old-maidish ways. For the Talberts were now getting into a domestic groove down which it seemed likely they would slide until the end of their lives. They had of course seen the great world and the vanities thereof, and now they found that there was nothing like home, sweet home—especially when the disposition of the home-lover is such that he takes an immense interest in every detail which makes up that sweetness. With the exception of the perennial visit to town, they had not left Hazlewood House for any length of time since they settled down to rule its fortunes. They went to London this year for the last week in May and the whole of June. But Miss Clauson did not accompany them. She said outright that she hated London, and loved Oakbury and its belongings. So at Oakbury she stayed. A very curious choice on the part of a young lady who might, had she wished to do so, have spent the London season mingling

in the pursuits and gaities of what is called the upper circle.

However, her decision was a certain relief to her uncles. Had she selected to accompany them to town, they would hardly have known what to do with her. A handsome niece staying with them at their hotel would be—well, if not a nuisance, a responsibility. Approving as they did in the main of her treatment of Lady Clauson, they could not counsel her to go to her father's house. There were, of course, many families they knew who would have been glad to have taken charge of a niece of theirs, but Beatrice's staying at another establishment whilst Sir Maingay was in town would clearly show the world that there was a family feud. Nothing in the Talberts' eyes was worse than a proclaimed family feud. Hence it was that even now they spoke of Beatrice as only being on a visit to them. This delicacy on their part was a costly matter, for had they brought themselves to consider the girl as part of the house, they might with perfect justice and propriety have associated her with themselves in the June audit, so giving Horace another opportunity of showing his skill in accounts and estimates.

So when Miss Clauson refused to go to London she extricated her uncles from a dilemma. She stayed at Hazlewood House, and for five weeks ruled Whittaker and the other staid servants as well as she could.

The Talberts had now settled down for the remainder of the year. Autumn or winter would make little difference to them. They were not, as may easily be imagined, enthusiastic sportsmen. Sometimes they accepted an invitation for a day or two's shooting; but that acceptance depended more on the quality of the host than on that of the sport. Although when they did shoot, they shot fairly well—as they did most other things—it may be taken for granted that their knowledge of the proper treatment of game was more valuable when the game was lying in the larder than when it was flying or running about. They could advise you how to baste a hare much better than how to shoot him. So it was that after their visit to

London they looked upon themselves as pretty well fixed at Hazlewood House until the next spring.

Beatrice was now just past twenty-two. It really was high time that a suitor came, and the "Tabbies," who could easily have adapted their feminine gifts to matchmaking, began to think over the eligible young men in the county.

Then Fate produced some one whom until now she had kept in the background. But whether eligible or not is a matter we must discover by and by.

Beatrice entering the library one morning early in August found her uncles in high conclave. She saw at once that something had happened, and for the moment feared to hear that the red-currant jelly recently made from their own receipt, and almost under their own supervision, had turned mouldy. It was not that Miss Clauson was particularly fond of red-currant jelly—her fears were simply on account of the distress such a catastrophe would cause her uncles' kindly natures. However, the matter was not so serious as she imagined.

Uncle Horace handed her an open letter. "Read that, my dear, and tell us how we shall answer it." She read the following:—

"DEAR MR. TALBERT.—You and your brother have several times asked me to pay you a visit. May I come for a week or two this vacation? I am rather knocked up by hard work, and my doctor tells me I had better spend some time in a quiet place in the country. So I remembered your kind invitation; and if quite convenient to you, would come straight from Oxford to your house. Of course, although rather overworked, I am not an invalid, or I should not think of trespassing on you.—Yours sincerely,
FRANK CARRUTHERS."

"Who is Frank Carruthers?" asked Beatrice. "Some relation to us, is he not?"

"His mother was my father's half-sister."

"What relation does that make him to me?"

Herbert stroked his beard and grappled with the problem. "He must be your half first cousin once removed," he said at last.

"Exactly so," said Horace.

This point being settled, Miss Clauson requested further information about Mr. Carruthers. Thereupon Horace went into family history, which it will perhaps be better for us to look up on our own account. On such occasions Horace was apt to become rather prosy.

Old Talbert's half-sister, who was some years younger than himself, married, just before the successful *coup* came off, a man named Carruthers. It was no great match, and if Mr. Carruthers found domestic bliss it was well that he made his matrimonial arrangements before the "boom" in oil, tobacco, corn, or whatever it was, sent Mr. Talbert to Hazlewood House and county society. Had he deferred it till then the chances are that Mr. Talbert would have insisted on his sister doing better; for Carruthers had only a moderate fixed income as manager of some works in the north.

Somehow, after her marriage his half-sister slipped away from Mr. Talbert's life. As whole sisters and brothers so often do the same, this fact is not astonishing. Mrs. Carruthers had several children—but one after another they died off. She wrote to her half-brother announcing the birth or the death of each. He answered her letters in a congratulatory or consolatory way as the occasion required. This was about all the correspondence which passed between them. When Horace and Herbert were lanky boys in Eton jackets and round collars, Frank Carruthers was born, and actually lived long enough to give promise of growing up. Indeed, his father before he died saw his only surviving child a strapping young fellow of seventeen.

Mr. Carruthers left his widow an annuity for life and a few hundreds in ready money. She lived well within her income, and expended her capital in finishing her son's education. She may have had some of old Talbert's views of things in general, although lacking his means of carrying them out. Anyway she sent her boy to Oxford. There for three or four terms he behaved disgracefully.

He got into scrapes, difficulties, and debt. So far,

indeed, into the last that his mother, for the first and only time in her life, applied to Mr. Talbert for assistance. This was given readily, and the young man was once more set off straight.

Then suddenly Mrs. Carruthers died. Out of her annuity she had saved enough each year to pay a premium of assurance, and Frank, then just twenty-one, found that her foresight and love put him in possession of some seventeen hundred pounds.

Whatever his faults might have been he was passionately attached to his mother. Her death seemed to make a changed man of him. He immediately paid back Mr. Talbert's loan—better still, he went to work like a horse—an intellectual horse, of course. The consequence was that he became one of the most shining lights of his year, and was in due time rewarded by a fellowship.

This was lucky; for after having repaid Mr. Talbert, he had only enough money left to carry him to the end of his Oxford course.

Eventually he settled down to try and make his living, or augment the emoluments of his fellowship, as an Oxford "coach." At that particular time the supply of coaches was beyond the demand, so for some years, in spite of his brilliant reputation, passengers—or pupils—were few. But he stuck to the business, and latterly had been given as much, even more, than he could manage. Hence the overwork.

All this Uncle Horace told Beatrice in his own fashion—all except the wild oat episode. That was past and gone; Frank was now a successful man, so his youthful sins might be forgotten.

Beatrice until now knew nothing about her fractional cousin. An intermittent and languishing correspondence had existed between her mother and Mrs. Carruthers, but upon the death of his first wife Sir Maingay had not the least interest in keeping up any form of relationship with Mrs. Carruthers. It is doubtful whether he even knew of her existence. The Talberts, who were far too proud to disown any of their kin, had met the young man several

times, and had liked what they had seen of him. They had asked him to Oakbury, and after excusing himself once or twice he was now coming there.

"Is he a clergyman?" asked Beatrice. "He must be, I suppose."

"No," said Herbert. "He never took orders. The fellowship he holds did not make that indispensable."

"They ought all to be like that," said Beatrice. "Men oughtn't to be forced or bribed to enter the Church. Besides," continued she, "they ought not to make a man give up his fellowship when he marries. Just as he wants more money they take it from him. He must either give up his wife or his income."

Miss Clauson was growing quite a philosopher on the subject of marriage. She spoke about it as if it were an impossibility that she herself would ever be interested in the matter.

"My dear," said Uncle Horace gallantly, "I don't think a man would consider two hundred a year a great sacrifice if you were in the question."

She smiled faintly at the compliment. "Still the system must be bad," she said. "It might lead to all sorts of unhappiness. A man might keep his marriage a dead secret—might not marry at all. All sorts of misery might result."

"You may be sure," said Herbert, "what is—is best."

"Exactly so," said Horace.

"I am sure it is bad," she said decisively.

Miss Clauson must have been in advance of her day, the authorities now having in a great measure adopted her views and changed the system.

"Shall we write and tell him to come?" asked Horace. "It won't be any annoyance to you?"

"Why should it be—what difference will it make? Ask him by all means."

Then, hearing the patter of little feet outside, she left her uncles to answer their letters, and in a few minutes was out in the garden romping with the child.

Horace wrote a beautifully-worded letter to Frank Car-

ruthers, expressing the pleasure he and his brother felt at hearing of the promised visit. He begged him to fix his own day for coming, and to stay as long as he conveniently could. The letter was handed to Herbert for perusal and approval. Herbert read it, and after nodding his head, continued to hold the letter in his hand, whilst a kind of puzzled, thoughtful look spread over his face.

Strange to say, Horace also fell into a reverie. For some ten minutes the two brothers sat facing one another, stroking their beards. If that vulgar wretch from whose rank mind that feline nickname first sprung could have seen them he would, I am afraid, have been quite satisfied that he had chosen an appropriate designation, when he dubbed them the "Tabbies."

Herbert and Horace knew without speaking that their thoughts were running in parallel lines. They often thought of the same thing without a previous word on the subject. The similarity of their natures, no doubt, accounted for this.

"Herbert," said Horace at last, "you are thinking of what Beatrice said?"

"Yes, I am."

"So am I. It seemed a revelation, but we oughtn't to jump at conclusions."

"No," said Herbert, "but the fact remains. Some four years ago he had nothing but his fellowship to live upon."

"You are right—nothing. Beatrice spoke justly. She may by chance have struck the mark."

"I am afraid so. Still, we must not be hasty. Yet, whoever sent the child must have fancied it had some claim on us."

"It is ridiculous to suppose that an entire stranger would have done such a thing."

"Quite so," said Herbert.

"He may have been much tempted; at that time have been driven to his wits' end. It is a sad affair—let us try and piece it together."

Then, like a couple of old women, they began to construct their new theory.

"We will say," began Horace, "he was married four years ago."

"Yet was dishonourable enough to conceal it; so that he might hold his fellowship."

"Of course this is all supposition," said Horace. The word dishonourable in connection with one of his own kin grated on his ear.

"Exactly so," said Herbert. "I should suspect that the wife died—perhaps recently, perhaps shortly after the birth of the child."

"The latter, I should think. Frank makes a large income now, and could afford to give up two hundred a year."

"Yes," said Herbert, "the wife died after the birth of the boy. The older the child got the more trouble he found it to conceal its identity. Thereupon he sends it to us, trusting we may keep it."

"And now," capped Herbert, "after declining former invitations, he comes to us himself. The further we pursue the matter the clearer it becomes."

They were quite in a state of mild excitement. That they could draw logical inferences we have seen by the affair of Ann Jenkins's stockings. The brothers had both been distressed that all their speculations as to little Harry's origin had fallen to the ground for want of proper support. Now, at last, was a theory which, if it reflected dishonour on a connection of theirs, was at least tenable. It was improbable, but the whole affair was so monstrous that it needed an improbability to account for it. They absolutely argued themselves into believing they had found the truth.

"Didcot is the junction for Oxford," continued Herbert, after a pause.

"Besides," said Horace, "we cannot forget that his conduct once was not what it should have been."

That's the worst of going wrong. No amount of straight running will make people cease to look at times askance. The work of reformation is child's play to that of making your friends believe you have reformed.

Therefore Horace Talbert's remark was a clincher. Herbert toyed with the open letter.

"Shall we send this?" he asked.

They fell to stroking their beards once more, and continued the operation until the natural kindliness of their hearts reasserted itself.

"After all," said Herbert, "it is all purely conjectural."

"Completely so."

"He had better come, then."

"I think so. Besides, it will give us an opportunity of seeing him with the child—surely the instincts of paternity must show themselves."

"They are supposed to be very strong."

But as neither of them knew anything about paternity, these remarks were made in a doubtful tone, and were subject to correction.

The polite letter was sent, and a week after the ending of the Trinity Term the young Oxford tutor packed up his things and started for Oakbury.

As there is no occasion to make superfluous mysteries, it may at once be said that Frank Carruthers knew no more of the existence of the child whom his amiable uncles had argued themselves into believing to be in some way his property, than he knew of—for the sake of a simile—say the presence at Hazlewood House of a gray-eyed girl whose beauty would satisfy every demand of his rather fastidious taste.

CHAPTER X.

THE FRACTIONAL COUSIN.

MISS CLAUSON showed very little interest in the approaching visit. To this curious and, at times, almost apathetic young woman it seemed as if all young men were alike, although we have seen that she was capable of showing strong feeling and emotion, as when she rejected Mr. Mordle's love.

The only sentiments Miss Clauson felt about Frank Carruthers were these. She was rather glad he was not a clergyman, and rather sorry he was a sort of cousin. She was not very partial to clergymen, and she thought that male cousins were apt to presume on their relationship. Perhaps they do.

She had not even the interest which falls to the lot of hostess in preparing for the arrival of a guest. Herbert himself had seen that the large feather-bed in the chintz room had been carried down and aired at the kitchen fire. He had with his own hands given out the needed blankets, counterpanes, sheets, and pillow-cases, had even looked to the match-box and pin-cushion.

So, with something akin to indifference, Beatrice saw the lodge gate open, and Horace bring the horses and large waggonette up to the door. She noticed that the young man who sat beside him looked rather pale and washed out. She saw several portmanteaus handed out, so came to the conclusion he intended making a long stay. Then she resumed the book she was reading. It was far more interesting than any young man.

Nor was she disturbed for some time. It was close

upon the dinner, indeed Beatrice was already dressed ; so the Talberts took their guest to his room, and left him to make his evening toilet. Just before the gong sounded the three men entered the drawing-room, and Frank was duly presented to Miss Clauson.

When a young man and woman know it is their fate to spend several weeks together in a country house, and when there is a family connection between them, it is no use commencing by being distant to one another. At least, so thought Frank Carruthers, for he shook hands with Miss Clauson, and began talking to her as if he had known her all his life. Beatrice felt certain he meant to presume on his relationship.

Still she was very civil and kind to him, and welcomed him to Oakbury. By and by, in the course of his easy conversation, he made what struck her as being an original remark. What it was is not recorded, but as original remarks grow scarcer every day, any young man who makes one a minute after his first introduction to a young lady is something out of the common run. So Beatrice, for the first time, really looked to see what he was like. You may depend he had made up his mind about her looks at once.

He was pale, and appeared thin and overworked. By the side of Horace and Herbert he seemed a short, slight man, although he was quite middle height, and if thin had plenty of muscle. He was very handsome in his own style, and had a clever, intellectual look in his face. His eyes were dark and keen—not restless eyes, yet seemed to glance at everything quickly, and enable him in a second to make up his mind about the object at which he looked. There was an expression hovering about his mouth which a physiognomist would have told you hinted at sarcasm, and his chin proclaimed that he had a will of his own.

By the time Beatrice had finished her survey, and before she had come to any decision, except that he was by no means ill-looking, the gong sounded. •Horace offered his arm to his niece, and led her to the dining-room, followed by Herbert and Frank.

They dined at a round table, pulled almost up to the

window. It was pleasant at this time of year to be able to look out on the garden. If everybody knew the comfort of a round table when the party is small, the whole stock in the country would be at once bought up.

After all, in spite of his pale face, there seemed little the matter with Mr. Carruthers. His appetite was a fair one; but if a man could not make a good dinner at Hazlewood House his interior organisation must be in a state past redemption. So he ate like a hale man and talked like one whose brain was in full working order.

"It's very good of you to take charge of an invalid like me," he said across the table to Beatrice.

"You must thank my uncles. I am only a visitor like yourself, Mr. Carruthers." •

"And both very welcome," said Horace courteously.

"Exactly so," said Herbert.

"By the bye," said Frank, turning to Horace, "tell me what I shall call you and your brother. Mr. Talbert seems too stiff—Horace and Herbert too familiar. I could, like Miss Clauson, call you uncle, if you liked; but you are not old enough."

"I think as we are cousins we had better use the Christian name simply."

This was a great concession on their part. Only persons like Lady Bowker, who had known them from boys, called the Talberts by their Christian names.

"Thank you," said Frank. "Now enlighten me as to my relationship to Miss Clauson."

Herbert explained the matter. •

"Half first cousin once removed. An unknown quantity. If I were a mathematician I would try to express it in figures. It doesn't seem much, but it's better than nothing."

Beatrice felt sure this young man meant to include her in the arrangement just made with her uncles. She was wrong; it was many days before he called her anything except Miss Clauson. Love always should begin in a most respectful manner.

Then the Talberts, who had the knack of always inter-

esting themselves in their guests' affairs, and who were, moreover, capital listeners, asked him questions about his life at Oxford.

"Life!" he said; "it can scarcely be called life. All term time from nine in the morning to nine at night I try to fill up a vacuum—created by nature, but which nature does not seem to abhor—in young fellows' brains. You look upon a tutor's calling as rather an intellectual one, don't you?"

"Naturally we do."

"Then be undeceived. A man who keeps a shop requires far greater gifts. He has a variety of things to sell, and a variety of customers to send away equipped with what they want. My customers are all the same—my wares don't vary. I assure you, Miss Clauson, the dull, level stupidity of the typical undergraduate is appalling."

"Then it needs a clever man to improve them."

"Perhaps so—but clever in what? Not in learning. Clever in knowing what they are likely to be asked in examination. Clever in cutting off all superfluous work. As for the learning, the tutor need only be a page ahead of his pupil, and that does not constitute a supreme effort. Did you ever see a firework manufactory?"

He asked Beatrice this. It seemed a sudden departure from the subject. Of course she had never seen a firework manufactory.

"Well, they ram this and that into the empty cases. So do I. Saltpetre—Latin. Sulphur—Greek. Charcoal—history. Balls of coloured fire—various information. I ram and ram. The case is full and in place. The examiner applies the match and looks for the result. Then——"

"They burst in the wrong place," said Beatrice slyly. She was amused.

"Yes—many of them—burst and scatter the unburned charge to the winds in a ludicrous manner. Some, of course, fly straight and only come down like sticks after fulfilling their appointed tasks."

"But some succeed like yourself," said Horace.

"My dear Horace!" Frank fell into the Christian name

arrangement with the greatest ease. "The more I see of undergraduates the humbler I grow. I was successful, but if my competitors were like those I coach it's nothing to be proud of."

"Yet your learning brings these pupils to you."

"Not a bit of it. I have a knack of bringing dull fellows on, that's all."

"And perhaps the reason why you get all the dull fellows," said Beatrice.

"There's something in that," said Carruthers, laughing.

"You read Latin?" said Frank, suddenly turning to Beatrice.

"Yes. How could you tell?"

He laughed and gave her one of his quick glances.

"There is a little line between your brows—a very little one. Young ladies always knit their brows when they study hard. Latin for a lady is hard study."

"Other things besides study bring lines," said Beatrice rather coldly.

"Yes—trouble. But you can have had none. Pride may bring them. You are proud, but not severely proud. So I am right."

Certainly this young man was presuming. Beatrice, half displeased, said nothing.

"Won't you have some more champagne, Frank?" said Horace, noticing the young man declined Whittaker's mute offer of refilling his glass.

"No, thank you. I drink very little: although your wine is enough 'to shake the sternness of an anchorite.'"

"That is Byron, is it not?" asked Herbert.

"Byron misquoted," said Beatrice quietly. Frank gave her a quick glance.

"Are you sure?" he said.

"Certain. I looked it up last week. It is 'saintship,' not 'sternness.'"

"I looked it up some months ago. No; I remember, I couldn't find the book, so trusted to my memory. I was wrong, it seems."

"Homer sometimes nods," said Horace.

Beatrice was looking rather inquisitively at Frank. "What did you want the quotation for?" she asked.

"For—something or another—I forget now. As soon as I am allowed to work my brain I'll try and remember."

"Don't trouble—I know. I saw the mis-quotation last week."

Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course you wrote the paper," continued Beatrice.

"You are provokingly acute, Miss Clauson."

"What did Frank write?" asked Horace.

Beatrice smiled. She felt she was now going to take her revenge for Mr. Carruthers's remark about the Latin.

"That paper in the *Latterday Review* on landowners' responsibilities," she said demurely.

"Nonsense, Beatrice! Frank couldn't have written that. Did you?" continued Horace, more doubtfully, seeing his guest manifested no horror at the accusation.

"Young ladies should not read the *Latterday*," said Frank.

"Anonymous writers should not misquote," retorted Beatrice.

"But *did* you write it, Frank?" asked Herbert.

The two brothers looked the picture of anxiety. Frank laughed.

"Miss Clauson is horribly acute," he said.

Therefore they all understood that Mr. Carruthers was the author of the article in question, an article which, from the bold and original views it ventilated, had attracted a great deal of attention. Horace and Herbert looked aghast.

"Frank," said the former in a solemn voice, "you must be a Radical."

"You must," said Herbert sorrowfully.

Even the respectable Whittaker, who had listened to the conversation, pulled a long face, and seemed to say to himself, "He must be a Radical." That his masters' cousin should so disgrace the family was very distressing.

"Oh dear, no," said the culprit. "I'm not—are you, Horace?"

The utter absurdity of the question made them all laugh. Horace and Herbert thanked Heaven they were not Radicals.

"But there are respectable Radicals, are there not?" asked Frank innocently.

"A few," said Horace. Sad as the truth was, he was obliged to confess that there were one or two Radicals of his acquaintance whose social position raised them above consideration of their political creed. It was a fault in what was otherwise a fairly well-organised world. It was a satisfaction to have Frank's word that he was not a Radical. They told him so gravely.

"I fancy Mr. Carruthers is a communist," said Beatrice mischievously.

"Then my expressed opinion of your shrewdness suffers."

"But what are your views, Frank?" asked Horace.

"I have none in particular. I am willing to be guided by the best authorities—yourselves, for instance. Tell me why you hate Radicals so?"

"They are so—so—un-English."

"Ah. Then I detest them. Now you know what I am. I am English. Are you English, Horace?"

They told him solemnly they hoped and believed they were English to the backbone; but they told themselves they were Englishmen with insular excrescences rubbed off by foreign travel.

"Yes," said Frank, "it's a great thing to be English. Few people realise what it means. I do most thoroughly."

"That's right," said Horace. In spite of the landowner article, he was growing quite easy about his guest.

"I would pass a law," said Frank gravely, "making it penal for any Englishman to learn a word of a foreign tongue. Every time an English child conjugates a French or German verb he retards the millennium."

"The millennium!" said Beatrice, astonished.

"Yes—my idea of the millennium—which is when the whole civilised world speaks English. If we could only converse in our own tongue, every nation would be forced

to learn it, and so hasten the happy day. Wherever the English language gets a good footing it conquers."

"Of course you speak only your own language?" said Beatrice. She was by now getting quite interested.

"In my ignorance of what was right I learned one or two others. I am trying to forget them, but I can't do so."

"Well, in what other way would you show your patriotism?" asked Horace, who was amused.

"I would cling to every bit of foreign land we acquired, whether gained by force, fraud, purchase, or discovery. I wouldn't think whether it paid to keep it or not. It must benefit the original owners to become Anglicised; and whatever place it is, it is sure to come in useful some day."

"No wonder you hate Radicals," said Herbert approvingly.

"Well, what else?" asked Beatrice. He had been for the most part addressing his remarks to her, so she had a right to ask.

"Lots more. But, as we are also English, let me ask you a question. Doesn't it sometimes jar upon your pride to think that we are obliged to anoint full-blooded Germans as our kings and queens? How much English blood has the Prince in his veins?"

That was a very startling question. The Talberts immediately began to run down the Royal Family-tree. Frank took a piece of bread.

"I'll show you by an illustration," he said. "You'll be frightened. Here's James the First," he pointed to the bread. "Here is his daughter Sophia," he cut the bread in half. "Here's George the First," he cut the bread again. "Here's George the Second," cutting again. "Here's George the Third," cutting again. "Here's Edward, Duke of Kent," cutting again. "Here's the Queen, God bless her," cutting again. "Here's Albert Edward, Heaven preserve him!" He cut the bread for the last time, and sticking the tiny morsel that remained on a fork, gravely handed it to Beatrice.

"It's a mortifying state of things, isn't it," he asked, "for those who are so thoroughly English as ourselves? Don't you sympathise with the Jacobites, Miss Clauson?"

"I think you are talking rank treason," said Beatrice. She scarcely knew whether he was in jest or earnest. Perhaps he didn't know himself.

The dinner proper was just over. Whittaker came in with the crumb-brush and swept away James the First and his descendants through the female side. As soon as the wine was placed on the table the door was opened, and Beatrice's little boy trotted into the room. He was allowed to make his appearance for a few minutes at this time whenever there was no company. The Talberts, remembering their theory, put up their eye-glasses to note the paternal instinct their guest might display.

"Halloo," he cried, "another pleasant surprise." No doubt he meant to imply that Miss Clauson's presence at Hazlewood House was the first.

"Now, who is this?" he asked, as the boy ran to Beatrice's side. "Will he come to me? I am really fond of children."

Tempted by the irresistible bribe of grapes the boy trotted round the table. Frank picked him up, kissed him, tickled him, stroked his golden hair, and admired him greatly, but showed none of those emotions which the Talberts imagined they would detect. In fact, the way in which he met the boy removed their base suspicions entirely. They were glad of this, although it plunged them back into darkness. They felt very friendly disposed towards their cousin, and were glad to be able to think him as honourable a man as themselves. Probably they never really doubted this.

So in reply to his question as to whose child this merry laughing boy was, they told him the history of his appearance, and how Beatrice had begged that he might be kept at Hazlewood House.

"I don't wonder at it," said Frank. "I wish some one would send me another just like him."

Beatrice gave him a look of gratitude. Every word that confirmed her possession of the child was welcome to her. She had not yet looked at Mr. Carruthers in any way which carried emotion with it. Her glance was a

revelation. Till then he had no idea of what dark gray eyes could express.

She soon left the men ; but to rejoin them when they took a stroll round the grounds. Frank was here shown many clever little devices by which the Talberts perfected the out-of-door arrangements. He learned how they checked the consumption of corn and hay in the stables ; how they regulated the amount of coke used for the hot-house. Indeed, as he was quick of comprehension and in detecting peculiarities of character, he was not so very much surprised when, having returned to the drawing-room, he greatly admired a fine piece of knotted lace, to hear that the uncompleted piece of work was not Miss Clauson's, but wrought by that accomplished artist, Uncle Herbert.

CHAPTER XI.

"MORBID'S THE WORD!"

THANKS to the remarkably fine air of Oakbury and to an absolute cessation of anything like hard work, Mr. Carruthers soon lost his jaded appearance. At the end of ten days he declared himself to be in rude health, and his looks did not belie his words. Certainly those worthy housewives, his cousins, had taken great care of him. They fed and fattened him; insisting that he should take beef tea at intervals, and that his cure should be hastened by his drinking plenty of that old '47 port for which their father's cellar had been noted. Close as the "Tabbies" were in their housekeeping arrangements, they grudged the stranger within their gates nothing.

In less than a week Frank had taken the measure of his cousins—of his male cousins, at least. He had even ceased to be seized with an almost irresistible desire to go into a secluded corner and chuckle when he saw these great men engaged in some duty which is supposed to appertain peculiarly to womenkind; or when he heard their simple consultations on the price of meat, groceries, or other household commodities. Being, like Mr. Mordle, gifted with a vein of humour, he found the Talberts most interesting characters, but had he found their eccentricities wearisome, the kindness they showed him would have compensated for the discomfort. For, in spite of the exclusiveness which they were compelled by circumstances to adopt, they were amiable, lovable men. So Mr. Carruthers took them as they were, and liked the two brothers better and better the more he really understood them.

But Beatrice was another matter. He had studied her with even more attention, but felt that the result of his studies was unsatisfactory. So far as she was concerned he knew he had got at nothing like the truth; except on one self-evident point, that she was very beautiful. When first they met her beauty struck him, but it was days before he finished finding new and fresh personal charms; perhaps he never ceased finding them. Under certain circumstances such discoveries are endless.

Frank Carruthers's studies of Miss Clauson's outward shell should therefore have been very pleasing to that young lady, had the result been made known to her, and had she cared twopence to find favour in the student's eyes. For the rest he was in a puzzle, which he spent many hours trying to solve. Miss Clauson little thought, as she looked out of window and saw Mr. Carruthers lying on the turf with his straw hat tilted over his eyes and a thin blue stream of smoke curling up from his cigarette, that he was neither sleeping nor projecting a new political article for the *Latterday*, but thinking entirely of her own sweet self.

They had seen a great deal of one another during the last week. Frank was not a man who loved twenty-mile walks, or cared to rush from one end of a county to another to look at a rock or a waterfall. His idea of a holiday he summed up in the word "loafing!"

"A good loafer is a great rarity," he told Miss Clauson. "Loafing proper is an art which cannot be acquired. I have met with many spurious imitations, but the real article is hard to find. Show me the man who can spend a whole day like this and you show me one who can get very near to happiness."

"Like this," meant lying on his back as described.

"But you do something—you smoke," said Beatrice.

"Yes, for the sake of appearances. In these days of hard work a man mustn't be absolutely idle."

Of course she ought to have laughed at the feeble joke. But she did not. She looked down at him from her chair, and her gray eyes were annoyingly serious. In glorious

August weather, when the sky is a cloudless blue, when all the trees, except the spendthrift chestnuts, are in full beauty, when roses are still budding, breaking into bloom, and succeeding their fallen fellows, a young lady has no right to look seriously at the man by her side. Certainly not Beatrice Clauson with her beauty and fortune.

Yet she looked and spoke gravely. "You wrong yourself talking such nonsense, Mr. Carruthers."

He raised himself on his elbow. "I don't talk nonsense. I am speaking of my idea of enjoying a holiday. When I work it is another matter. I trust I work to the best of my ability. When I idle, I idle to the best of my ability."

"Your idea of human happiness is a humble one."

"Is it? Then give me yours in exchange."

Beatrice was silent. She even turned her head away.

"Well, I am waiting for the definition." There was no trace of levity in Frank's voice as he spoke. His manner was as serious as her own.

"I have none to give," said Beatrice.

"None—at your age! Are your dreams all gone? Young ladies do dream, I believe. They dream of being queens of society; of marrying rich men; if they are romantic, of marrying poor men; they dream of a life of religion; of having a mission to perform. Which is your particular dream?"

"I have none," she said coldly.

"You must dream. You are sleeping now, and all sleepers dream at times. Only in the wide-awake bustling world do people forget their dreams. They work on and on, and to some the day comes on which one of their old dreams is realised. Alas, by that time they have almost forgotten that they ever dreamed it, or they find it realised too late."

Beatrice sat silent with her eyes cast down.

"Perhaps I have not guessed the right dream for you," continued Carruthers. "I forgot you were such a learned young lady. Your dream may be the fame of the scholar or the writer."

"I have no dreams," she repeated. He looked her full in the face.

"Can you say also 'I have had no dreams?'"

She made no answer. As he looked at her he thought that even at this moment she seemed far away in dream-land. He told himself that if Miss Clauson brought herself to assert that she had never dreamed she would be breaking the—he couldn't remember which commandment—the one about lying. By the bye, is there any commandment to refrain from falsehood, except the indirect one as to "false witness"?

"Not even of rank, riches, fame, power!" he said, in a lighter tone. "Miss Clauson, you are incomprehensible."

She chose to turn the subject. "I am going to the village now," she said.

"With your permission I will accompany you."

She made no objection. It is a curious fact that, in spite of his glorification of the noble art of loafing, Mr. Carruthers was always ready to go walking with Miss Clauson wherever and whenever she permitted it. But no man is consistent for twenty-four hours at a stretch.

Mr. Carruthers, in his attempted study of Beatrice's disposition, found it very hard to hit upon the word which would, so far as he as yet knew, describe its chief characteristics. That a strong element of sadness was mixed up in it he felt sure. It was just possible that this was introduced by the unfortunate differences between herself and her father. Having learnt that she had been a guest at Hazlewood House for eight months, he was shrewd enough to make a pretty correct guess at the true state of affairs. But there was more than sadness to account for. There was apathy. However the Talberts viewed it—whatever high-bred charm they fancied was vouchsafed to Miss Clauson by the bestowal of that reserved calm manner of hers, Frank knew its true nature was apathetic. It seemed strange that an intellectual girl like this had no desire, or no revealed desire, in life—no ambition, social or otherwise. From the very first he judged her character by a high standard—quite as high as that by which he judged her

beauty. As their intercourse grew more familiar he found he had no reason to abate either. Naturally, Frank Carruthers, Fellow of — College, Oxford, was a clever man, and after taking so much trouble about the matter, should have been able to sum up a weak woman's character correctly.

So, after a great deal of reasoning, he came to the conclusion that he had found the word to suit her. Beatrice was morbid. Every one knows that the best cure for morbidness is to awaken the patient's interest in his or her fellow-creatures—in even one fellow-creature will sometimes do.

Therefore, it was very kind of Dr. Carruthers, after such an exhaustive diagnosis, to set about endeavouring to effect a cure. A good action will sometimes bring its own reward.

His view of the case was greatly strengthened by noticing that Beatrice never appeared to better advantage than when she had her little boy with her. It was the interest she took in this tiny fellow-creature, which made her for the time display those qualities which all unmarried men, with right ideas, so exalt in a woman—affection, kindness, and forbearance with children. Single men, if they are good and poetical—synonymous terms, I hope—are apt to think that a woman never looks more charming than when she has a child or children with her. Sometimes, after marriage, they have been known to express a wish that the association need not be so eternal.

But although Mr. Carruthers decided that Beatrice was morbid, he had still to account for the appearance of the disease in a mental constitution which ought to have been the last to have succumbed to it.

The more he tried to account for it, the more he was forced to accept, as the primary cause, one thing—a thing, even in these early days, most unpleasant and unpalatable to him. But he could not ignore the fact that young ladies who are victims to what is called an unfortunate attachment do sometimes grow morbid, and try to make their friends believe that life for them is at an end.

So one evening, shortly after his arrival at Hazlewood House, Frank asked his hosts, of course in the most casual disinterested way, many leading questions about Miss Clauson—why she was not married, or at least engaged, and so forth. The Talberts returned their old answer that it was time she thought about it, but perhaps she took after themselves, and was not of a marrying disposition. This Mr. Carruthers ventured to doubt.

"She may have been disappointed in love," he said carelessly. All the same he refilled from the claret jug the glass from which he had been drinking 1847 port.

"My dear Frank," said Horace, with grave dignity, "Miss Clauson would never permit such a thing to happen."

"Certainly not," said Herbert.

"Permit what? Permit herself to fall in love?"

"No; permit herself to be disappointed in love. She is far too—too well-bred for such a thing to occur. When she makes her choice it will be one of which we all approve; so disappointment is out of the question."

"That's highly satisfactory," said Frank. "A well-regulated young woman is the noblest work of—well, of modern times."

They were by now getting accustomed to him, and although rather shocked at Beatrice's being called a young woman, did not show it.

"Then her choice is not yet made?" continued Frank.

"Not to our knowledge, and, I may add, not to Sir Maingay's."

Mr. Carruthers asked no more questions. He strolled out into the garden and talked quietly to Miss Clauson, until the stars showed themselves in the sky.

Having ascertained that Miss Clauson was under the charge of no other amateur doctor, Mr. Carruthers could, of course, set about curing her disease without any fear of outraging professional etiquette.

CHAPTER XII.

A HORSE ! A HORSE !

It must not be supposed that no mention of any friends or acquaintances of Miss Clauson's implies that she led an isolated life at Hazlewood House. She had, indeed, plenty of both. It could hardly be otherwise, as the Talberts were very great on the subject of the interchange of social civilities, and kept a visiting book as carefully as any lady could have done. One of Miss Clauson's friends came several times across Frank Carruthers's path about this period.

This friend, or acquaintance, was a fine hulking young fellow of about twenty, the heir to, and hope of, one of the families of position. A great good-natured, broad-shouldered boy, who would doubtless in a year or two develop into something that a mother might be proud of, and a young lady feel happy to have for a suitor. He was an Oxford undergraduate, and for a while had been one of Frank's pupils. So when he came up to Hazlewood House one morning, of course to see the Talberts, he was much surprised at finding the celebrated Oxford coach sitting at his ease just like an ordinary unlearned Philistine. He hung about the place until Beatrice appeared, and, after a while, Frank heard him ask her when he might call and go riding with her.

Although Mr. Carruthers, when inquiring into Miss Clauson's likes and dislikes, had ascertained that she was fond of riding, he had not as yet seen her on horseback. Perhaps the sharpest shaft in Love's quiver was kept to be shot the last.

The Talberts were not great at horseflesh. In the first place, they loathed a horsey man, and although, as part of a gentleman's education, they had learned to ride well, they preferred in their maturer years the carriage seat to the saddle. They had a pair of well-matched carriage horses, and recently a horse had been bought for Beatrice. After it was purchased she did not, however, make much use of it. She could not ride out unattended, and when a groom went with her it necessitated his using one of the carriage horses. So she only rode when her uncles were not going to use the carriage, or when some chance escort like young Purton offered himself.

At present her horse was in the hands of the veterinary surgeon, so there was no chance of young Purton's being gratified. Nevertheless, the account of the animal's progress towards recovery was good, and Miss Clauson hoped it would be returned to her very soon.

After this interview Mr. Purton used to ride up to Hazlewood House every morning to learn if Miss Clauson's horse had come back. He was very anxious to hire or borrow another one for her use, but his offer was firmly declined. Perhaps, after all, Beatrice only cared for riding in a comparative way.

Frank Carruthers, when he met the young fellow dressed in the most natty and approved equestrian costume, used to laugh and jest with him, and ask for the latest bulletins anent the convalescing steed. He knew that young Purton had once or twice ridden into Blacktown to see what progress the invalid was making.

For his own amusement Frank would address humorous questions, clothed, for the benefit or distress of his late pupil, in elegant Latin and Greek, until young Purton fled incontinently, or boldly asserted that he ought not to be tormented before his time.

But one morning, to his inexpressible delight, he found the horse reinstalled in the Hazlewood stables, and, moreover, Miss Clauson willing to don her riding gear, and allow her cavalier to take her for a twenty-mile ride.

Frank had the pleasure of seeing the two ride away in

company; young Purton feeling and showing how immensely superior a being a good horseman, intrusted with the care of a fair lady, is to the best Oxford coach who could let Greek and Latin "run out of his mouth like water, by Jove!"

Miss Clauson's appearance on horseback need not be described; but Mr. Carruthers, after watching her supple, graceful, but, alas! vanishing figure, buried his hands in his pockets, and walked about the garden in a seemingly reflective mood. Then for a while he went back to his favourite holiday occupation of lying on the lawn and doing nothing.

Horace and Herbert by this time had finished their housekeeping, or china dusting, or whatever kept them indoors. They joined him, and laughed at his laziness. He tilted back his hat, and looked up at them sleepily.

"I say, Horace, where can I buy a horse?"

"A horse!"

"Yes. I had quite forgotten it, but my doctor insisted that as soon as I got better I should take horse-exercise."

"I didn't know you could ride."

"Yes, I can. Something, of course, very quiet. Oh yes, I can ride until I fall off. The worst is that whenever I fall from anything, whether a horse or a ladder, I come on my head as certainly as a shuttlecock does."

"Take one of the carriage horses," said Herbert.

"We can use the dog-cart," added Horace.

"Not a bit of it. You wouldn't look well in a dog-cart. It's not a dignified conveyance enough. No. I will buy me a horse, and sell him when I leave you. I will not trust myself to a hireling. 'The hireling'—what is it the hireling does?"

"Forsakes the flock," said Herbert.

"The sheep," said Horace correctingly.

"Yes, to be sure. I am neither a sheep nor a flock, but fear the hireling would treat me badly. So tell me where to go for a horse."

"It seems great extravagance, Frank."

"Extravagance! What is extravagance? Spending more than one can afford. I am rolling in money. I am

disgustingly rich. I fear not to meet either my bootmaker or my banker. Besides, in justice to my doctor, I must have his prescriptions made up, no matter what they cost."

They saw he was in earnest, so called their coachman to assist in the search for a steed. The coachman, in his striped linen waistcoat, joined the group, and waited his masters' commands.

"William," said Horace, "Mr. Carruthers is thinking of buying a horse. Do you know of anything for sale round about here?"

"Do I know of a hoss, sir," said William reflectively.

"Something quiet," put in Herbert, who was solicitous for Frank's safety.

"A hoss—something quiet," repeated William. "To drive or ride, sir?" he added, turning to Frank.

"To ride."

"A hoss—quiet—to ride. There's Mr. Bulger's cob, sir. His man said he were for sale."

Frank did not like the sound of Mr. Bulger's cob. Herbert and Horace thought it was just the thing.

"Well up to your weight, sir, after Mr. Bulger," said William. "Such a shoulder, such quarters, such a barrel, he've got, he have!"

"Who?—Mr. Bulger?"

"No, sir—the cob."

"Ah yes—the cob. But there are barrels and barrels. I want one with an ordinary capacity—I shouldn't care for the great tun of Heidelberg."

"Certainly not, sir," said William, touching his forelock.

"Cobs' backs are so broad," continued Frank musingly. "It seems contemptible to bestride them. The temptation to chalk one's feet and ride standing would be irresistible. Would you find it so, Horace?"

"Well—no. I don't think I should," answered Horace, with that polite gravity which always amused his cousin.

"Mr. Bulger won't do, William," said Frank. "Try elsewhere."

William scratched his nose, and for a minute was in earnest thought.

"There's Captain Taylor's mare," he said, with a timid glance at his masters. "She as ran off with the stanhope and smashed it. But they *say* she goes quiet enough with a saddle on her back—leastwise if a man knows how to ride."

"We won't deprive Captain Taylor of his treasure," said Frank. "Think again."

"Will you go to Barker's repository, sir?" asked William who had come to an end of his equine researches.

"Where is it?"

"In Blacktown," said Herbert. "We will go with you."

"No, thank you. I will make my own unbiassed choice. No one shall be blamed if I come to grief—except my doctor. Is Barker an honest man?"

"He is supposed to be so," said Horace.

"He's as honest as hoss-dealers is made," said William.

"Then I'll trust my neck in Barker's hands. I'll walk into Blacktown at once."

He went indoors and put himself into town-going trim. The brothers saw him depart with some misgivings, but as he once more declined the offer of their assistance, politeness would not let them press it.

At the lodge gate he found William waiting for him. "If I may make so bold, sir, you say to Mr. Barker that I sent you to him—William Giles, sir, Mr. Talbert's man. Barker ain't so bad as some, sir; and when he knows I shall have something to do with the hoss, maybe he won't try and best you."

"Thank you, William, for your disinterested kindness," said Frank gravely.

"Don't mention it, sir," said William, with politeness perhaps caught from his masters. "William Giles, Mr. Talbert's man—you'll remember, sir?"

"Certainly, William. Is there anything else I ought to say to Mr. Barker?"

"No, sir, not as I know of."

"Shall I tell him you deserve five or ten per cent on the transaction?"

William's face was a study. He looked at Frank in a

startled way, then glanced guiltily round to see that his masters were out of earshot. Then he looked at Frank again, and, catching the humorous twinkle in his eye, chuckled convulsively.

"Oh, Mr. Carruthers, you know the inside of the ropes, you do. If you ride as well as you reckon up, you might 'a' bought Captain Taylor's mare. Don't think Barker will take you in much, sir."

"Perhaps not; but I'd better make sure. Fetch me a nice clean straw, William." William obeyed without comment. His respect for Mr. Carruthers had greatly increased. Frank took the straw, and breaking off a piece with the empty ear attached, stuck it between his teeth. "Is that the right length, William?" he asked.

"Bit too long, sir; but you'll have chewed him down proper by the time you get to Barker's."

"All right." Frank passed out through the gate, and left William opining that he "was the rummest gent as ever came to the house: one never knew if he was in earnest or chaffing-like."

Frank soon got rid of the straw which he had mounted for William's mystification, and reached the repository without any signs of horsiness about him. He had an interview with the tight-legged proprietor, and for the next hour stood watching horses white, horses black, horses piebald, horses brown, bay, and chestnut, trotted up and down the long tan-covered way. He heard Mr. Barker eulogise each particular animal. He listened because he liked to study character—human, not equine—and was fascinated by a desire to know what Barker would find to say when each fresh screw appeared on the scene. But his silence as to his own opinion concerning the merits or demerits of each animal, and the calm contemplative way in which, smoking his cigarette the while, he watched the horses pass and repass, drove Mr. Barker almost to distraction. That worthy didn't know whether he had to deal with a flat or with a wiser man than himself. All business men are aware that this places one at a terrible disadvantage in a negotiation. It is annoying to find you have treated a

clever man like a fool; but doubly so to find you have treated a fool like a clever man. This is one of the risks of business.

Mr. Barker was the more uncertain because he tried Frank both ways. On each of the first fifteen horses he showed him he placed a ridiculously high price—then resolving that his customer was a knowing one, he veered round, and asked a very low figure for the next score of animals paraded. Yet Frank made no sign, and Barker was quite puzzled. He even grew suspicious and glanced at Frank's legs, thinking it just possible that their owner was a horse-dealer from another town, who had come dressed like a swell, to try and take in the redoubtable Barker himself. But Mr. Carruthers's lower limbs were as straight and well-formed as if he had never in his lifetime crossed a horse. So Barker was beaten, and breathed his equivalent to a sigh as the last of his five-and-thirty screws was led back without having drawn a word of condemnation or commendation from his visitor.

"Well, you're a hard one to please, sir," he said grimly.

"I wanted to see some horses," said Frank listlessly, slipping the ash from his cigarette.

"Oh!" said Barker, with a deep-drawn breath. "You—wanted to—see—some hosses, did you?" It was only in moments of great excitement that Mr. Barker forgot himself enough to call his wares "hosses." He was a well-to-do man with daughters who played the piano. He knew that the proper pronunciation of the word raised him above the level of the grooms and stable-boys. He had acquired it with great difficulty, so its retention was precious.

"Yes, I did," said Frank pleasantly; "but never mind. Sorry to have given you so much trouble. May I give your boy half a crown?"

"Now," said Barker, cocking his head on one side and speaking in a confidential whisper, "without saying a word about the horses I have shown you, tell me what's your idea of a horse—his value, I mean."

"I'm not particular."

"Oh, you're not particular. Jim, bring out the chestnut."

"No," said Frank, "never mind. I don't want to see him. I want you to choose a horse for me."

No doubt horse-dealers are as honest as other dealers, but Mr. Barker's astonishment was indescribable. It might have been that of a convicted forger given a blank cheque and asked to take care of it, or that of a wolf to whom a sheep brought its lamb and begged that it might be looked after for a while, or that of a cat asked to stand sentinel over the cream.

Yet he was equal to the occasion. "Want me to choose a horse? Can't do better, sir. Whenever the duke or the marquis wants a horse in a hurry they write to me to send them one. S'pose if I can suit the duke, I can suit you."

"I don't know. I'm fidgety. You can try."

Still Barker couldn't feel certain whether he was dealing with a sharp man or a fool.

"There's the chestnut I spoke of. He's the very thing for you."

"How much?" asked Frank laconically.

"One hundred and twenty guineas," said Mr. Barker, with that emphasis on the last word which says that the vendor is proof against the same number of pounds.

"Look here," said Frank sharply, "you find me a horse for six weeks. I don't care if it's black, brown, or blue. Name the lowest price you mean to take, and if the price suits me and I buy it and don't find any particular vices, I'll give you twenty per cent more, and the horse to resell for me at the end of the time. Now then, is it the chestnut?"

Barker made a long pause; then with an assumption of candour said: "No, sir, after that it isn't the chestnut. You come here, I'll show you what it is."

Mr. Carruthers never told any one the exact price his horse cost him, so we will not force ourselves into his secrets. He left the repository having settled that if a veterinary surgeon's certificate could accompany the dark bay horse just shown him it might be sent to Hazlewood

House that afternoon. Then he bade Mr. Barker good day and strolled back to Oakbury.

Just before he reached Hazlewood House he was overtaken by Beatrice and her cavalier. They reined up and spoke a few words. Young Purton was in high good humour, and delightfully condescending.

"Pity you don't ride, Mr. Carruthers," he said.

"It is a pity. Will you coach me? Revenge is sweet, you know."

"I'll bring my father's old horse round some morning and give you a lesson. I daresay you would soon pick it up."

"You were always a kind-hearted boy," said Frank gratefully. "Miss Clauson, do you think I could learn to ride?"

"You are too lazy, I fear."

"Yes; I suspect I am. I won't trouble you, Purton. Good-bye."

The horses trotted on, and Frank sauntered back to Hazlewood House smiling placidly.

In the afternoon, to Miss Clauson's supreme astonishment, the new purchase arrived. She and Frank were in the garden at the time. The bay was placed in Mr. Giles's charge, and that personage, after inspecting it, rejoiced for two reasons: the first, that Mr. Barker had not "bested" Frank; the second, that even if Frank had "bested" Mr. Barker, the horse must have cost a pot of money, and at whatever figure his, William's, introduction might be assessed, the backsheesh must be worth having.

"I thought you didn't care for riding," said Beatrice.

"I don't—much."

"Then why buy such a horse?"

"Because I should like to ride with you."

He gave her one of his quick glances. Beatrice turned away, ashamed to feel that she was blushing. She was very cold and reserved during the evening, yet the audacious young man chose to take it for granted that she would accept him for her cavalier *vice* Purton superseded.

Horace having duly admired the horse and shaken his head at the palpable extravagance, made a series of elaborate

rule-of-three calculations, and determined, if three horses ate a certain quantity of certain things in a certain time, how a fourth horse would affect the quantity, the things, and the time.

Young Purton was too shy to offer his escort on the next morning—he feared lest he might wear out his welcome. So his ride was a solitary one. Judge his utter disgust when, quietly trotting along, he encountered Miss Clauson and Mr. Carruthers, the latter mounted on a steed, the like to which Mr. Purton had for years longed to own, and, moreover, riding as if he knew all about it.

This sight was very bad for young Purton. Had he been poetical he might have compared himself to the eagle struck down by its own quill.* As it was, he muttered, “A jolly sell, by Jove!” and after the unavoidable greetings and Mr. Carruthers’s inevitable bit of badinage, rode home in a disconsolate state.

CHAPTER XIII.

GASTRONOMIC AND EROTIC.

THE long vacation was running down to the lees. August had passed into September and September had softly stolen away. The scarlet geraniums, calceolarias, and other bedding-out plants which had all the summer brightened the gardens of Hazlewood House, were beginning to show signs of senile decay. The under-gardener found it no light work to keep the paths free from fallen leaves. Yet Frank Carruthers still lingered at Oakbury enjoying his cousins' hospitality. Having assumed the post of mental physician to Miss Clauson, he was no doubt reluctant to resign it until he had effected a radical cure.

Besides, the days slipped by happily enough. There were drives through the green elm-shaded Westshire lanes which led to hills from the summits of which fine views of the country and the distant sea are obtainable. As Horace drove, and as Herbert invariably occupied the box-seat, Frank and Beatrice had the body of the large waggonette to themselves, an arrangement which one of the two found far from unpleasant.

There were the delicious rides together. Young Purton left the place in disgust and joined an eleven of old Cragtonians who were wandering about England playing matches—a far better and more healthy occupation for a boy than hopeless love-making. The bay horse turned out such a beauty that Frank broke his word to Mr. Barker and did not resell it.

Then there was company. Pleasant people who visited Hazlewood House, and pleasant people whom Hazlewood

House visited. Frank was such a success with these that Horace and Herbert were quite proud of their cousin.

And there were walks with Miss Clauson ; and above all those delightful dreamy hours when they sat under the sycamore, and in that cool shade talked of everything in the world, the heavens above, or the waters under it. Or it may be Miss Clauson was silent, and Frank, watching every line of her beautiful face, knew that the disease which he himself had taken was becoming chronic and incurable.

Altogether, it will be understood that if Mr. Carruthers failed in curing Miss Clauson's complaint it would be from no want of opportunity, or from being debarred making an exhaustive study of the patient.

In plain English Frank had fallen in love with Beatrice, in that good old-fashioned way, almost at first sight. He had gone down before her gray eyes as surely as had the susceptible Sylvanus. Would he fare any better?

About this date he often asked himself the above question ; for he had by now made the curate's acquaintance, and learned that he was a rejected man.

He did not learn it from Beatrice, who, like every true woman, wished to hide, and, if possible, forget the story of a man's discomfiture. He did not learn it from Horace or Herbert. Although they were as fond of gossip as men always are, wild horses would not have rent such a confidence from their kindly hearts. Sylvanus himself was Frank's informant.

The energetic, bustling curate had returned to Oakbury. During his absence the Talberts had requested Beatrice to decide as to the terms of intimacy which should for the future exist between Hazlewood House and Mr. Mordle. Beatrice quietly told her uncles that it was her particular wish that the Rev. Sylvanus should be received on exactly the same footing as heretofore. This decision gave the Talberts great satisfaction. They were unable to see how parochial affairs could go on unless they worked hand in hand with the curate. So when Sylvanus returned he was informed that he might tricycle himself up to Hazlewood House as often as he chose. Which, as he was resolved

to caseharden his heart by accustoming himself to seeing Miss Clauson in the light of nothing more than a friend, was very often.

So Mr. Carruthers and the curate met frequently. They recognised each other's good points, and were soon on terms of friendship such as fiction, at least, seldom allows to exist between rivals. Rivals is perhaps the wrong word, for if any stray fragment of hope clung to Mr. Mordle's portmanteau, and so returned with him to England, it was swept away for ever and ever as soon as the owner saw Frank and Beatrice together. He recognised destiny, and bowed to it as a well-bred man should.

It was no doubt the desire to prove incontestably to himself that he was cured that made him in a moment of brisk confidence tell Frank how he had fared. The manner in which the communication was made showed Frank that his own secret was no secret from Mordle. If he did not meet confidence by confidence he made no attempt at deception. He looked at Mordle with a curious smile.

"You scarcely expect me to say I am sorry?" he asked.

"No. Want no sympathy. Only want you to be sure that when the time comes to congratulate you I can do so with all my heart."

"Ah!" said Frank, smiling. "Noble — very noble. When the time comes," he added softly. Thereupon he fell into a train of thought—a train which ran upon a single line and always took him to one particular station.

This, then, is how matters stood at the beginning of October. Mr. Carruthers, having completed his diagnosis, not perhaps to his entire satisfaction, felt that the moment was drawing near when he must make the supreme effort to expel for ever that morbidness which he believed to have entrenched itself in Miss Clauson's system. Still, he was bound to confess what many other practitioners ought to confess, that he was working in the dark. He was about to try a kill or cure remedy, the desperate nature of which would, strangely enough, act not upon the patient but upon him who administered it. No wonder, with so little to guide him, he hesitated and postponed.

At this juncture the Talberts gave a dinner-party—a man's dinner-party. The following were the blessed recipients of invitations: Lord Kelston, who was staying for a few days at his place; Sir John Williams, of Almonds-thorpe; Colonel White, the officer commanding the regiment at the neighbouring barracks; Mr. Fallon, the polished Royal Academician, who was sojourning at the village inn, and making outdoor sketches of autumnal foliage; and Mr. Fletcher of the Hollows, the largest landowner, save Lord Kelston, in the county. These, with Frank and the hosts, made a party of eight—the number which, according to an axiom of the Talberts, should never be exceeded.

From the above names and descriptions it will be rightly guessed that the party was distinguished, well-selected, and well-balanced. Selection and balance were matters upon which the brothers prided themselves as much if not more than they did upon the refinement of the dinner itself. In this particular party, small as it was, culture, learning, art, arms, landed interest, and hereditary sway were properly personified. It was, indeed, a representative gathering after the Talberts' own hearts.

But two days before it took place an event happened which threatened it ill. Lord Kelston wrote Horace one of those pleasant familiar letters which, coming from a lord, are always delightful. He said he should take the liberty of bringing his friend Mr. Simmons with him. As this would raise the number to nine, it necessitated asking another man in order to equalise the sides of the table.

Then came consultation high and earnest. Whom could they ask upon so short a notice worthy of forming one of such a distinguished party? Each of the Talberts would have felt insulted had he been asked by a friend to stop a gap, so following the golden rule they shrank from the task before them. Still, they could not have four on one side of the table and three on the other.

Frank listened to their solemn deliberations for some time, then tried to help them out of the difficulty. "Leave me out," he said. "Beatrice and I"—he spoke of her sometimes now as Beatrice—"will dine together in the

nursery or the housekeeper's room. Whittaker can bring the dishes straight from your table. It will be delightful."

"My dear Frank!" This joint exclamation showed the utter futility of his suggestion.

"Why not ask the rector? I thought it was the duty of a country clergyman to meet emergencies like this."

"He talks about nothing but his fishing," said Horace mournfully.

"Fishing for what? For men?"

"No; salmon and trout," answered Horace, as usual taking the matter prosaically.

"Why not Mordle? He is capital company."

"Ha-hum," said Horace, glancing at Herbert. "This is scarcely a curate's party."

"No, scarcely," said Herbert, shaking his head.

At last they decided to ask a Mr. Turner, but the decision was arrived at with misgivings; for Mr. Turner was in trade. He was, however, a merchant-prince—even a merchant-emperor, and, as Horace expressed it, was a member of the aristocracy of wealth. They felt that Mr. Turner might be asked at short notice, and would not be offended when he heard it was to meet Lord Kelston. This is one of the many advantages of entertaining lords.

Nevertheless, they were conscience-stricken at having asked any one to stop a gap, so made amends by arranging their guests so that Mr. Turner should sit on Herbert's left hand; Horace's supporters being Lord Kelston and his friend Mr. Simmons. The latter was a man of middle age, with dark eyes and exquisitely chiselled aquiline features, and wearing an air of refinement which at once commended him to Horace.

The dinner began propitiously, and progressed faultlessly. The table, over the decoration of which the brothers had spent much time and more thought, was a perfect picture. When their guests were only men the Talberts were extra particular. The lack of the refining element, the presence of woman, had to be compensated by an ultra-fastidiousness of detail. Even Frank, who had been behind the scenes, marvelled at the effect of his hosts' hospitable

and artistic exertions. But, all the same, he pitied them as we should all pity a host who is certain to be rendered wretched by a tureen of burnt soup or a bottle of corked wine.

Horace talked gravely and pleasantly to the right and to the left. Herbert was compelled to attend almost entirely to Mr. Turner, who had a booming voice, which he insisted upon making heard. Frank, who was next to the artist, found the dinner not so dull as he had feared it would be.

In the course of conversation Horace learnt that Lord Kelston's friend was Mr. Simmons, the noted barrister, who had so suddenly sprung into eminence. Mr. Simmons was a Jew of gentle birth and education, and Horace was very fond of high-class Jews. So the two men got on admirably. Frank also knew who Mr. Simmons was. Herbert did not.

All went on as well as the Talberts could have wished until the claret was placed on the table. Then an awful thing occurred—a *contretemps*, which to this day is a sore subject with Horace and Herbert. It all arose from inviting the stop-gap. Listen.

Mr. Turner, as leaders of commerce are very properly in the habit of doing, began talking about England's commercial condition. He spoke in his biggest voice. As he was treating upon a subject on which he was an authority, he felt he had a right to use it. Herbert listened with his gentle, polite smile, but felt sorry Mr. Turner had been invited.

"What is ruining England?" boomed out Mr. Turner. "I'll tell you, my dear sir. The Jews are ruining England."

As Mr. Turner must know best, Herbert simply bowed in acquiescence.

Horace in the meantime was saying to Mr. Simmons, "It is an indisputable fact that the Jews are the most loyal, patriotic race under the sun. Their cleverness no one denies. In the finer, the emotional arts, such as music and poetry, it is generally admitted that a man must have a strain of Jewish blood in him to rise to eminence."

Here Mr. Simmons bowed and smiled.

"Read one of the trade gazettes," continued Turner fiercely.

"I should not be able to understand it," urged Herbert.

"Read the list of bills of sale," shouted Turner. "See the Levis, the Abrahams, the Moseses, who are battenning on borrowers. The Jews are the curse of the country. They are sucking out its blood and marrow."

And Horace, who, although he shuddered at Mr. Turner's strident tones, avoided listening to his words, was saying to his neighbour—

"In the law and in statesmanship we have living proofs. And as to that branch of which I understand nothing, commerce, we have but to mark the decay of Spain after the persecution and expulsion of your gifted nation."

But Mr. Simmons did not hear this compliment. He was listening to loud-voiced Turner.

"Look at Austria! Ruined, sir, ruined by them! All the land in their hands. I wish the time would come again when the Austrian students at Pesth——"

"Pesth is in Hungary," said Herbert softly.

"Hungarian students, then. The time should be again when they used to go of a morning and rake over the ashes of burnt Jews to find the gold pieces they had swallowed."

Everybody heard this coarse and brutal wish. Mr. Simmons's face flushed. He half rose from his chair, and glanced at Horace. That glance was enough to make him resume his seat.

The look of horror, absolute horror at a guest's having been insulted at his table, which Horace's face wore, was more than wonderful—it was sublime. Never had such a thing occurred before. Such another shock would be all but a death-blow. His knees trembled; his face grew white to the very lips. He met Simmons's glance with an entreating, appealing, apologetic look, that spoke volumes of abasement and mortification.

Mr. Simmons, with the quickness of his race, read what was passing in Horace's mind. His anger merged into pity for his courteous, kindly host. He reseated himself, and said with a pleasant smile, "How curious such things

sound to men of the world like us." Then he said something in praise of the Lafitte. Horace gave a sigh of relief, and to his dying day will love that gentle Jew.

But Herbert had seen his brother's face, and knew that a catastrophe had happened. He guessed that Mr. Turner's Jew-baiting proclivities had brought it about. So he adroitly turned the conversation, and by an admirable exercise of self-abnegation set Turner booming away about the iniquities of the mayor, aldermen, and town council of Blacktown. It was an heroic act, and no one but Herbert knew what it cost him.

Taking it altogether, the Talberts do not count that dinner among their social successes.

Frank Carruthers had by now grown rather tired of Fallon on the principles of true art. He, seated midway between the hosts, had fully appreciated the Simmons-Turner episode, and was longing to give vent to the laughter which politeness compelled him to stifle. Moreover, he was thinking a great deal about Miss Clauson, and how lonely she must be feeling. A young man always flatters himself that the young woman he loves is lonely without him.

Frank knew that when the party adjourned to the drawing-room he should see Beatrice. Her uncles wished her to be there; and it was not the rule of Hazlewood House for the men guests to go straight from the table to the smoking-room. So whilst Horace and Herbert were seeing that the curiously-shaped Venetian flasks were going round with hospitable, but not with coarsely convivial speed, Mr. Carruthers was summoning up courage to desert his post and cheer Miss Clauson's loneliness. The thought of that loneliness grew so painful that, taking advantage of Horace's being engaged in deep conversation with Lord Kelston, he rose, slipped from the room, and passing across the hall opened the drawing-room door.

The drawing-room door, like every other door in Hazlewood House, did its duty without noise. There are some people's doors which always scrape and bang, just as there are some people's shoes which always creak. The Talberts'

shoes never creaked. The Talberts' doors never uttered a sound. So Frank stood on the thick soft carpet and looked at Miss Clauson, who had no idea that her solitary exile was ended.

She was seated on the music bench. Her hands were on the keys of the piano, but making no music. She was gazing with grave eyes far far away—looking right through the centre of the satin-wood Sheraton cabinet which, full of choice porcelain, stood against the opposite wall. Her thoughts, sad or sweet, were in dreamland.

And Mr. Carruthers stood watching her. He knew he was doing wrong—knew he ought to make her aware of his presence—but the picture was to him so divinely beautiful that he could not help himself.

The girl was perfectly dressed; if fault could be found with her attire it was that it was a trifle too old for her age. Her arms and neck gleamed white and fair from the black satin of the dress, which fitted as a dress can only fit a form like hers. The rich brown hair was cunningly and becomingly coiled, and without jewel or even flower to detract from its own native glory. No wonder that Carruthers was content to watch her in admiring silence!

And as he watched he saw, or fancied he saw, tears rising to those gray eyes. This was more than human nature could bear.

Mr. Carruthers to this day assures himself that he entered that drawing-room with no intention of precipitating matters. We may believe him, because, as it was probable that in a few minutes nine respectable middle-aged gentlemen would troop in, the occasion was not a propitious one. So it is clear that he acted on the impulse of the moment.

He never knew how he dared to do it, but before she looked round he was at her side, his arm was round her—a music bench offers dangerous facilities, it has no back—and he was telling her with passionate eloquence that he loved her—he loved her! There was none of poor Mr. Mordle's hopelessness about this ardent young Carruthers.

But how did Beatrice take it? With a low cry as of fear, perhaps aversion, she sprang to her feet and stood for

a moment looking at him with a face as pale as death. Then without a word she turned and went swiftly towards the door. Frank, with a face as pale as her own, followed and intercepted her. He grasped her hand.

"Beatrice, have you nothing to say to me? Nothing?"

She breathed quickly. She seemed to set her teeth. She answered not a word.

"Beatrice, have you nothing to tell me? Cannot you tell me you love me? Answer me."

There was no trace of raillery or lightness in Mr. Carruthers's manner. It was that of a man playing for a life or death stake. "Answer me. Say you love me," he repeated.

"I cannot," said Beatrice hoarsely. "Let me go."

Without a word he dropped her hand. He even held the door open and closed it when she had passed. Then with a stern look on his face he stood in the middle of the room, gazing at the blank door and wondering if he was dreaming—if he had really, since he entered that room, played his great stake and lost it.

Could Frank Carruthers have followed Beatrice to her room, he would have seen her throw herself on her bed and burst into a paroxysm of grief. He would have seen the sombre Mrs. Miller come to her, embrace her, soothe her, and entreat her. He would have seen a look of stern resolution settle on the servant's strongly-marked features, a look which contrasted strangely with the affectionate solicitude which she displayed towards her mistress in her trouble.

But Carruthers could not see these things, and had he seen them would have been no wiser for the sight.

CHAPTER XIV.

"HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL."

AFTER Beatrice had left the drawing-room Frank stood motionless for a couple of minutes. He could not at once realise his position. In a dim indistinct way he saw what a mighty change his failure must make in his life, but he absolutely shrank from calling up a finished picture of what he fancied his future life must be, uncoloured by the love which he had by now learned to look upon as indispensable to making the picture a pleasing one.

He could not understand it. He could not believe it. Frank Carruthers, although perfectly able to value himself fairly, was no coxcomb, ready to fancy every little act of kindness or polite attention on the part of a woman an evidence of a consuming passion for himself. Although for weeks he had been making veiled love to Beatrice, there was no one action of hers to which he could point and say "that gave me hope and led me on." He had not felt her hand linger in his own. He had not seen a sudden blush dye her cheek as he drew near. He had not caught those earnest gray eyes fixed upon him with a meaning which lovers readily guess. It was perhaps the very absence of anything approaching coquetry and encouragement which to Frank had made the girl so well worth the winning.

Nevertheless, there was something—he could not, dared not particularise—something in her manner, more especially during the last few days, which had, well, to say the least, been of great comfort to him. He fancied, it may have been but fancy, there was a change in the way in which she spoke to him—perhaps in the way in which she looked at

him. Yes, there must have been something, for, although he did not put the thought into words, Carruthers knew that had Beatrice been the same to him as in the early days of their acquaintance, no love of his, however dominant, could have forced him to put the question he had just put with such a sorry, and, it may be, unforeseen result. The man's half-cynical exterior hid a proud and sensitive nature. Had hope been entirely absent he would not have bared his heart to the woman he loved best in the world.

Even in the first bitterness of defeat he did not blame her. That all was ended and over he never doubted. His feelings were those of bewilderment. He could not understand it—could see no reason for this summary and without-appeal rejection of his love.

"I must go and think it all over," he muttered. "I can't think here, in this room where the perfume of her dress still lingers."

He stooped and picked up a flower which must have fallen from her dress. He took a glove which was lying on the piano.

"What a leveller love is," he said grimly; "one laughs at the idiotic proceedings of others, and when one's own time comes does just the same. A glove! A flower! Conventional emblems, lacking even originality. What a fool I am!"

Nevertheless, he kept them both, and no doubt derived as much comfort from them as the possession of such things is supposed to give.

After this he took his hat, and, forgetting all about the dinner-party, went out into the garden to think. In spite of his assumed calm he must have been strongly moved, for he commenced his operation of thinking by digging his heel into the immaculate gravel path so viciously that the large roller was needed for half an hour the next morning in order to smooth matters down. Then, ashamed of this burst of passion, he walked down to the bottom of the garden, and regardless of October dews and chilly air, threw himself on a seat and strove to account for what had

happened, and to determine its result so far as his own future was concerned.

But think as he would, and we may presume his brain was a clever and able one, Mr. Carruthers could only get to three conclusions, unsatisfactory when taken singly, and, of course, trebly so in the aggregate. Firstly, he was more in love with Beatrice than ever. Secondly, he could not understand why she had refused him. Thirdly, having once asked a woman to be his wife, nothing would induce him to repeat the question.

"No, I won't grovel," said Frank. "Most fellows seem to grovel when they are in love. Hang it, I won't! I'll be original in that respect if I have to cut my heart out."

These remarks were of course applicable to conclusion number three—a conclusion at which love always laughs. Given a prouder man than Mr. Carruthers, and as hopelessly in love with a woman, that woman, if she wished, might have a fresh declaration of undying passion every week in the year. Oh yes—all lovers can "grovel" if needs be.

By and by a curious whim seized this particular lover. He would go down and see Sylvanus Mordle. Not that he wished to unbosom his woes to the curate—that would be grovelling with a vengeance—but there seemed a certain grim propriety in seeking and sitting with the other man who was rowing in the same boat, or, to put it poetically, the man whose barque of joy had been wrecked upon the same rock as his own. Besides, Mordle would be sure to talk about Miss Clauson—he always did. "What a fool I am!" said Frank more bitterly than ever. Nevertheless, he walked down to the curate's lodgings.

Mr. Mordle lodged in one of a row of new houses which a sanguine builder had erected on a plot of ground not far from the church. When these houses were first built the villagers expressed their wonder as to who would inhabit them. They were red brick houses with freestone dressings—the kind of houses classified as "genteel" residences. As such, they were a cut above the villagers, and many cuts—quite a gash, in fact—below the "families of position."

As half of the houses are empty to this day the builder has ceased to wonder at the villagers' wonder.

When Frank was shown into his room Mordle jumped up and greeted him cheerfully. "Hallo!" he jerked out. "You here? Why, what's up?"

"I only came for a smoke and a chat."

"Thought you had every one—all the swells—up at the house to-night."

Frank started. "I quite forgot them," he said, with lack of caution unusual to him.

"Forgot them! How shocked Horace will be—how grieved Herbert! No matter. Here you are."

Whilst speaking the curate bustled about. He opened a drawer, took out a box of cigars, then shut the drawer with a bang. He opened a cupboard, took out a bottle of whisky, then slammed the cupboard door. He slapped the cigars, the whisky, a water bottle, and a glass on the table in front of Frank, and waited for him to help himself.

But Mr. Carruthers sat silent and motionless. He was looking at Mordle, who was still bronzed by the sun, and seemed to be in an aggressively rude state of health. He wondered if the curate felt as wretched when Beatrice refused him as he, Frank Carruthers, did at that moment. If so, and if Sylvanus had really conquered his disappointment, he was more of a man than his visitor, and as such entitled to respect. He got so deep into these speculations that he did not notice the curate's curious glances.

"Look here, Carruthers," said Mordle briskly. "You forget a dinner-party. You come to chat and smoke with me. You don't smoke—you don't chat. What's up?"

"Nothing." Frank roused himself and took a cigar.

"Nothing!" said the curate. "That means everything."

"Well then, everything."

"And everything, as I take it, means—tell me what it means, Carruthers. May I wish you joy?"

There was a lump in Sylvanus's throat, but he choked it down manfully. Frank wondered at the curate's quickness in guessing. Men in love always wonder at the pre-

ternatural gift of detection with which their friends seem endowed.

"May I wish you joy?" reiterated Mordle.

"You may wish what you like ; but the truth is we are partners in misfortune."

"You have tried?"

"And failed." Frank rapped the words out sharply. Mordle looked the picture of surprise. He held his hand out to his visitor.

"Hang it!" said Frank. "I don't want pity. If you bore it, I suppose I can."

"Our cases are different. You felt certain of success."

"Did I? If so, it was only one of the delusions natural to a man of my age."

"Explain."

"The older you grow the more liable you are to delusions. A man between thirty and forty more easily deludes himself into believing that a woman loves him than a boy of twenty does."

"Ha!" said Mordle. "All new to me, this. Let me think it over." The curate loved an argument of this sort. Presently he looked up.

"That's all—rot!" he said. "Boy of twenty—modest and good—can't see any reason for a woman's loving him. Man of thirty or forty—successful in life, say—measured his strength against his fellows—can't help feeling he's quite worth being loved. See how fallacious your argument."

"Never mind," said Frank ; "it doesn't matter which way you take it."

"I say," continued Mordle, laying his hand on Frank's shoulder. "Listen to my advice. Don't you take 'No' for an answer."

"I'll ask no woman twice to be my wife," said Frank, with conclusion number three fresh in his mind.

"You might ask this one twenty times and feel happy if you got her then. But twenty times won't be needed. She loves you now, Carruthers."

"What folly you talk!"

"I don't—I never talk folly. I have seen you together,

I have watched her as closely as I watch one of my flock who leans towards dissent. I have seen what you haven't seen, and again I say, don't take 'No' for an answer."

"Let us talk of something else," said Frank. All the same the old proverb about the looker-on and the game came to his mind. Under some circumstances there is much solace to be got out of proverbs.

They talked of something else, but as it always does when a man is in love, that something else veered round ever to the one thing. At last Frank threw the end of his cigar away and bade the curate good-night. Mordle's emphatic cheery assertion that he ought not to despair had done him good, although he still swore he would not "grovel" and ask again.

His guest having left him, Sylvanus drew himself up and patted his chest approvingly. "It was magnanimous, very magnanimous," he said, "to help a rival like that. But I am thoroughly cured, so could afford to do it."

He always told himself he was cured. Perhaps he was. All the same the Rev. Sylvanus Mordle is a bachelor to this day.

Frank went back to Hazlewood House, and apologised for his strange absence as best he could. He had been seized with a splitting headache and compelled to seek fresh air. Strange to say a splitting headache had also driven Miss Clauson, not into the fresh air, but to her room. "Thunder in the air, no doubt," said Herbert, the most unsuspecting of men.

About half-past eleven the last of the guests departed. Mr. Turner, believing Lord Kelston's friend to be an aristocratic Christian of the most orthodox type, bade him an effusive good-night, little dreaming of the insults he had been heaping upon his head. Horace and Herbert gave a sigh of relief as their Jew-hating guest left the house. They had too much sense to think of apologising for the mishap—they merely doubled their civility to the eminent Israelite. At last every one had said good-bye, and the shutting up began.

Frank in a moody, sullen way watched Horace and

Herbert as they went from window to window trying shutters and bars and bolts. He did not smile even when Horace gravely and deliberately counted the forks and spoons in Whittaker's basket—the extra plate given out for dinner-parties—whilst Herbert blended together two half-emptied bottles of sherry and made one full one. The domestic duties were at last finished; the bottles locked up; the spoons and forks snugly tucked up in little chamois-leather bags, ready to be put to rest in the safe until again wanted. Horace and Herbert looked at Frank.

"Shall we go to bed now, or would you like to stay up longer?"

Frank started out of his reverie. He did not feel in the least inclined for bed. "If you don't mind," he said, "I will go into the library and write some letters. The fresh air has made me so wide-awake, that I shan't be able to sleep for a long time."

They did mind, of course; but were too polite to say so. Whittaker was ordered to take the lamp into the library, and Frank bade his cousins good-night.

"Please turn the wick down low before you blow it out," said Horace.

"And," entreated Herbert, "would you mind turning the hearthrug upside down when you leave the room? It makes it last so much longer."

Frank promised, wondering the while why the constitution of a hearthrug was such that the night and early morning air impaired it. Then he sought the library, closed the door, and was alone with his own thoughts.

There is no occasion to recapitulate these. We have had them all before, and they grew no more cheerful. Even Mr. Carruthers got tired of them at last, and to break the monotony made a pretence of writing a letter to a friend. But the sight of pen and paper woke a strong temptation to say again by their aid all he had already said to Beatrice, as well as all he meant to say when cut so suddenly short. But his pride would not allow him to break so quickly his resolution number three.

Then he tried to read. Naturally he turned to poetry.

All lovers turn to it as inevitably as a duck does to water. He took Tennyson from the shelf, and for the first time in his life sympathised with the ill-used egotistical hero of *Locksley Hall*. After this he chanced upon a volume of Mrs. Browning's, and read all about the poet who, although so passionately in love with Lady Geraldine, was thick-headed enough not to be able to detect the existence of a corresponding sentiment on the part of her ladyship.

And just as Mr. Carruthers reached the part where the lovely lady comes by night, passes through the poet's window, and in rather a forward way does all the wooing, he heard a light finger-tap on the library door. A wild but not altogether unnatural thought ran through him. Was a second Lady Geraldine episode about to occur? Could it be that Beatrice——

He ran to the door and threw it open. On the threshold stood, not Beatrice, but—terrible disappointment—the black-robed figure of Mrs. Miller, the nurse. What in the world could this sombre uninteresting woman want with him at this hour of the night?

"You—Mrs. Miller!" he exclaimed. "Is anything the matter?"

"May I come in, sir?" she asked.

"Certainly; what can I do for you?"

She entered the room and carefully closed the door. Frank's wonderment grew. He could not help picturing the dismay which would fall upon Horace and Herbert had they known that at one o'clock in the morning he was conversing with a female member of their establishment.

Mrs. Miller drew near to him. "May I speak a few words to you, Mr. Carruthers?" She asked the favour respectfully, but as one who fully expected it would be granted.

"Speak away," said Frank good-naturedly. "But is there anything wrong in the house?"

"Nothing more than you know of, sir."

Her words bore a meaning which did not escape Carruthers. They told him that Mrs. Miller was quite aware of what had taken place between him and Beatrice.

He winced mentally. The thought of his rejection becoming the gossip of the servants' hall was not pleasant.

"Well, let me hear what you have to say." He spoke with more asperity than usual.

The strange visitor laid her hand on his arm. She was a tall woman, he was a man of middle height, so the faces of the two were all but on a level. Frank, who had never until now taken particular notice of the nurse, was much struck by the wild intense look in those dark eyes which gleamed from the white worn-looking face. He began to wonder if her wits were all right. But she spoke sensibly, although there was passion in her voice.

"Mr. Carruthers," she said, "tell me how much you love Miss Beatrice?"

The sudden question staggered as well as annoyed Frank. He frowned. "I am not in the habit of making confidences to—to strangers." He was going to say "inferiors," but it was a word he hated using.

"Oh, sir; don't misunderstand me. Tell me—" the woman spoke with startling earnestness—"tell me: set my mind at rest. Let me know that you love her with all your heart and soul—that the very ground her foot presses is holy to you—that you could cherish her, care for her, be true to her until death! Tell me this and make me happy. Surely you are not ashamed of loving her?"

Her manner was so impressive that Carruthers for the moment forgot it was but a servant who addressed him. "No," he said, speaking slowly, and with his eyes fixed on the opposite wall. "No, I am not ashamed of loving her. What concern it is of yours I cannot divine; but I love your mistress as much as a man can love a woman."

Mrs. Miller bent down and kissed his hand. She murmured a few words which he could not catch. Most men, not being kings or princes, object to having their hands kissed. Frank did. "Have you anything more to say?" he asked.

"Only this, sir—you will wait, will you not?"

"Wait! For what?"

"For her—for Miss Beatrice. Oh! Mr. Carruthers, you

won't go in a fit of anger, and give yourself away to the first doll-faced woman who smiles on you? You will wait for the woman you love—five, ten, twenty years, it may be?”

She clutched his arm, and her eyes looked at him with that same intense imploring gaze.

“I shall never marry another woman,” said Frank.

“No—never. Wait for her. She shall be yours at last.”

A thought struck Frank. Did this strange woman come to him of her own accord, or had Beatrice sent her? His heart beat violently. “Are you giving me a message from Miss Clauson?” he asked.

“No, sir. Miss Beatrice is not one to send messages by servants. She doesn't know I have come to you. You won't tell her, Mr. Carruthers? Promise me you won't tell her!”

Her face grew paler than before, as the possibility of Carruthers's telling Beatrice of this nocturnal interview rose before her. She seemed so distressed that Frank hastened to assure her he would not mention the matter. Strange as was this woman's manner something showed him that she meant him well.

“She would never forgive me if she knew.” She whispered these words in an awestruck way, as if such a thing was too fearful to contemplate.

“Tell me why you trouble yourself about my affairs?” asked Frank.

“Why do I trouble! Because she is all in this world and the next to me. Because I would kill myself to save her from a pain of mind or body. Listen, Mr. Carruthers. Years ago—she was then but a girl of seventeen or eighteen—she saved me from starvation, from death, from worse. She fed me, clothed me, called me back to life, and saw that I lived. I say to you, Mr. Carruthers, that if I stood with one foot across the golden threshold of the heavenly gate, even if my eyes had caught a glimpse of God and His angels, my ears heard the sound of the harps of the blest, if below me I saw the fiery gulf—if I knew that withdrawing my foot would bring her happiness, I would withdraw it, and be doomed for ever.”

Her figure seemed to dilate as she uttered this tremendous rhapsody. It certainly sounded like an exaggerated expression when used to illustrate the devotion of one woman to another. But the depth of the love which woman can bear to woman has never yet been rightly plumbed.

Even Frank, who we may presume considered Miss Clauson worthy of out-of-the-way adoration, felt that Mrs. Miller's eccentric and profane description of her sentiments towards her mistress was more exalted than any occasion could warrant. Nevertheless, as she was sounding the praises of the woman he loved, his heart softened towards her.

"This is sheer idolatry," he said, not unkindly.

"Call it what you will, sir. •I mean all I say, and more."

"And because you are so fond of her, you wish to see her future in my hands, feeling sure it will be a happy one?"

"Yes, sir. I have watched you day by day, and have seen that you love her. I have asked about you, and heard you spoken of with the tongue of good report. Besides——"

She hesitated. Carruthers hoped she would finish the sentence with some information as to the true state of Beatrice's feelings. Mrs. Miller's assurance that she had good grounds for asking him to wait for an indefinite time would be thrice welcome. Lovers and drowning men ought to be coupled together in the matter of catching at straws.

"Well, besides what?" he said, seeing she still hesitated.

"You are both of 'the elect,'" she said in strangely solemn accent. "The seal is on your foreheads."

"What *do* you mean?" asked Frank in bewilderment.

She clasped her thin hands together; her eyes shone with strange brilliancy. "Mean!" she exclaimed, so loudly that Frank glanced at the door to make sure that it was closed. "Mean! Can it be possible that those blessed ones who are predestined to be saints hereafter can walk the earth and know it not? I can see it, can read it on your face—on Miss Beatrice's face. 'Many are

called, but few are chosen'—few are chosen. You are of the few."

"Oh!" said Frank. He was beginning to understand that he was dealing with a religious fanatic. His bewilderment was succeeded by pitying curiosity, tempered by sarcasm.

"If one could believe it, it would be very satisfactory," he continued. "Tell me why you feel so sure about us? Our creed must differ from yours."

"Creed!" she burst out. "You were chosen before there was a creed in the world. The seal is put on the elect as they draw the first breath. It may be that a heathen who has never heard God's name shall sit on the steps of the great throne, while he who has lived on earth the life of a saint shall go into everlasting fire."

"This is predestination with a vengeance," thought Frank. "Why do you feel so sure about Miss Clauson and me?" he asked.

"I can read it in your faces. You are to have happiness in this world and in the next."

Frank's sense of humour made him feel inclined to ask Mrs. Miller about the ultimate fate of the gentle Horace and Herbert, with their kindly hearts and old-womanish ways. He would even have liked to know what was to become of the sedate Whittaker, and William Giles, the coachman. But he checked the questions. He saw that what was amusement to him was death to the pale excited woman at his side. He did not wish to enter into a theological argument, and at this time of night play Pelagius to this feminine disciple of Augustine. Indeed, he knew that the arguments of those who hold the doctrine of predestination, and its correlative, reprobation, are logically unanswerable by the best theologian ever turned out of Oxford; and theology was not Mr. Carruthers's pet science. So he contented himself by expressing a polite hope that Mrs. Miller felt also sure of her own salvation.

"I!" she exclaimed, and a shudder as of terror ran through her. "I have prayed day and night—day and night—that an answer may be given me, that a sign may be shown to me. The answer has been given."

"Well, you found it all right, I hope," said Frank, to humour her.

She leaned forward, and again clutched his arm. "I am 'one of the many,'" she said, in a low, thrilling whisper. Her face wore a look of utter hopelessness. Frank pitied the poor creature from the bottom of his heart.

"My good woman," he said, "your belief is simply a diabolical one. Get rid of it, and trust that there is some mercy to be shown to those who ask for it. Go and talk to Mr. Mordle or the rector, or some one whose business it is to set things of this kind straight. Now, I think we had better say good-night."

"Good-night, sir. Thank you," she said, with a sudden return to her usual calm and respectful manner. Then, with bent head, and hopelessness written all over her, she walked slowly to the door. A thought struck Carruthers.

"Wait a moment," he said; "I should like to write a line to Miss Clauson."

"Love-letters will do no good, sir."

"It's not a love-letter," said Frank somewhat sharply. Mrs. Miller waited.

He took a sheet of paper. After what had happened he felt he could not address the woman he loved as "My dear Miss Clauson," and he did not dare to write "My dear Beatrice." So his letter began abruptly, without address of any kind. Moreover, it was very short. Here it is:—

"Now that I have asked my question, and you have given your answer, tell me would you rather I left this place at once, or stayed on as I intended.—Yours, F. C."

He handed the letter to Mrs. Miller. She took it in a reluctant manner. "You have not written anything unkind to her?" she asked.

"Nothing. Take my word for it."

"And you promise you will wait?"

"I must wait, whether I like it or not," said Frank rather bitterly.

"Good-night, sir." Mrs. Miller curtseyed, and stole noiselessly from the room.

Frank fell back into a reverie. How strange that in the few hours since he had been rejected two persons had bade him wait and hope—Mordle, in his cheery, optimistic way, Mrs. Miller, in her sombre, half-entranced, highly-wrought religious frenzy. Poor woman! what extraordinary ideas she held! She must be next door to a religious monomaniac, with her ghastly tenets of foreordination and predestination.

Nevertheless, if either of his counsellors gave him hope, it was this mad, wild-spoken fanatic. She was, so to say, Beatrice's body-servant, and as such might be presumed to know something of the secrets of her mistress's heart, or at the least to be able to make a shrewd guess at them. So, in spite of his own common sense, in spite of her dismal jargon about the elect, the seals, and the rest of it, the hope which springs eternal began to throw up a tiny shoot in Mr. Carruthers's heart.

At last he went to bed, wondering what answer he would receive to his letter. It is to be hoped the promise he made Mrs. Miller was to be more sacred than those made to Horace and Herbert, for he blew out the lamp anyhow, and left the hearthrug to take care of itself.

Alas for the "hope eternal!" It was all but crushed in the morning by a note from Beatrice, which, with the bathos attending all modern emotional incidents, was brought in with his shaving water. It ran so:—"Please go away.—B. C." Then she added in a postscript—"Don't think me unkind. It is better for your sake."

He crushed the paper in his hand, and no doubt cursed, not Beatrice, but his ill-luck. He could not go away that day. He felt that such a sudden departure would set the brothers gossiping and trying to account for its cause. But, as persons generally do in such extremities, he received a letter or a telegram, the nature of which made it imperative he should leave on the morrow.

Horace and Herbert expressed genuine sorrow at this sudden termination to his visit. They pressed him to come to Hazlewood House at the end of the next term. He promised to do so. Only by foreswearing himself could he

avoid giving an explanation of what made his presence for the future impossible. Of course he saw Beatrice as usual ; but neither by word nor look did he allude to what had passed between them. On her part she seemed shy and constrained, and the old apathetic manner appeared to have reasserted its sway. Dr. Carruthers's cure for morbidness was a failure !

The moment for departure came. Horace had taken the reins. Herbert was beside him. Frank's portmanteaus were stowed away in the big waggonette. He turned to shake hands with Beatrice. "I came here an invalid in body," he said to himself ; "I go away with a chronic mental disease. The exchange is a sorry one."

"Won't you come with us, Beatrice?" asked Herbert.

She drew back her outstretched hand and hesitated. Frank turned his eyes away. He would in no way plead for this concession. Suddenly, and in a defiant way, which such a trivial matter by no means seemed to call for, she exclaimed, "Yes, I will come. Wait for me one minute." In one minute, literally, she was back again, in her hat and jacket, and seated opposite Frank.

Few words passed between them during the drive to the station. A mere good-bye was all they said as Frank took his seat in the train ; but as that train rolled out of Blacktown, as his eyes for the last time met Beatrice's fairly and fully, Mr. Carruthers's heart leaped in a way which would have been a credit to a boy's of eighteen, and once more and for ever he knew that no vanity of his had led him to dare to think that in Miss Clauson's manner towards him there was an undefinable, inscrutable "something," which had led him to risk and apparently lose all.

So "hope eternal" sprang again, and the conviction forced itself on Mr. Carruthers that the day might come when, in spite of his conclusion number three, he must perforce "grovel."

And, notwithstanding his pride, this fact was by no means an unpleasant one !

CHAPTER XV.

A DISPUTED CLAIM.

DURING the last three months of the year Hazlewood House did not belie its reputation for calm regularity of its domestic concerns and immunity from the many petty ills and annoyances which afflict less methodically-conducted establishments. So far as could be seen, all promised well for a quiet, placid, and uneventful winter. Horace and Herbert employed themselves as was their wont. They were men who could spread out a little occupation over a large slice of time, so never found the hours hang wearily. Beatrice seemed fairly happy with her bright-haired boy. The little fellow was now beginning to prattle merrily, and his manner towards the Talberts was more audacious and familiar than ever. Altogether it looked as if nothing would occur to disturb the even tenour of life at Hazlewood House, until the budding hedges once more brought round the usual spring cleaning.

But, all undreamt-of by the brothers, storms were brewing which were to shake their house to the foundations.

Christmas came. Now Christmas Day was a day on which the Talberts made great sacrifices for the good of their fellow-creatures. Sylvanus Mordle, who believed that those in poverty were as much entitled to creature-comforts as to spiritual consolations, always sent the hat round at Christmas, and collected a special fund for the purpose of giving all his very poor people a hearty dinner. At this dinner the Talberts were his henchmen. No one who knew their fastidious tastes could have seen them carving huge joints of sanguinary-looking beef or serving out sticky

segments of plum-pudding without feeling sure that, at heart, they were thoroughly good fellows. Herbert did once plaintively ask Mordle if the meat need be *quite* so red. The curate chuckled. "If it wasn't red, they'd say 'twas American, and leave it," he answered. It is to be feared that experience had taught Mordle that charity is often looked upon as a right to be demanded, not a bounty for which to be thankful.

It was no doubt the terrible sights of the forenoon which made the Talberts rigidly taboo, so far as their own table was concerned, all conventional Christmas fare. As Horace gravely said, there is, to educated minds, something savouring of vulgarity in supposing that the celebration of a certain holiday must be attended by the consumption of a certain class of comestibles. So their dinner consisted of clear soup, fish, a brace of birds, and an omelet.

"We never thought of Beatrice," said Herbert penitently. "Beatrice might have liked roast-beef and plum-pudding."

But Miss Clauson did not yearn for Christmas diet. Moreover, her thoughts were far away from eating and drinking. Indeed, during the last three months the girl had been, even for her, strangely quiet and thoughtful. As for a little while longer we must be contented to regard her from the outside only, her musings cannot be divulged. To-day, no doubt, she was thinking a great deal about an impending visit to her father's house.

Horace and Herbert had urged it earnestly. Not, as they kindly and truthfully told her, that they wished to lose her for even a day. But it was well that the world should think that the Clausons were a united family. It is curious what a simpleton most people think the world, and how easily they fancy it can be taken in.

Beatrice consented to be guided by her uncles' advice. So on the day after Christmas she left Oakbury. Sir Maingay and his family were wintering in London. It is surprising the number of respectable families who do winter in London.

Sir Maingay met her at Paddington. The baronet looked a little rounder and a little more commonplace than

when last she saw him. He greeted his daughter affectionately, but told her she looked ill and careworn. Then he inquired for Horace and Herbert. As from the very first day they had kept Sir Maingay in his proper place, he looked upon them with the greatest respect. "Is it true they have adopted a child?" he asked. Some garbled version of the affair had reached him.

"No," said Beatrice. "I have."

"You, my dear! Adopt a child! Why, it is time you thought of the possibility of having children of your own. I have for months been hoping to hear you were engaged to be married."

"I shall never marry," said Beatrice, rather coldly.

"Depend upon it, it is the best state," said Sir Maingay eagerly. Then he started off on the subject of the precocity which Beatrice's little half-brothers displayed. How the elder said this yesterday and the younger did that the day before—a record of individual but not general interest.

But just before they reached his house, Sir Maingay made a more notable remark. "I made the acquaintance this week of a young relative of your poor mother's—a Mr. Carruthers, who was staying with you some time ago. I told him you were coming up, and he promised to call."

It was growing dusk, so the flush that leapt to Miss Clauson's cheek was unseen. She was silent for half a minute, then she said quietly, "I shall be very glad to see Mr. Carruthers."

Lady Clauson was gracious and condescending. She had gained some sort of success in town last season, so could afford to be so. Nevertheless, Beatrice was in various ways shown that she was a stranger within her father's gates. The little boys were brought down to see her dressed in their company clothes and manners. They were good, ordinary, uninteresting little fellows, and no doubt Miss Clauson contrasted them with a golden-haired pet of hers at Oakbury. Although the ladies were civil to each other they did not sympathise. Like many others, Lady Clauson was utterly unable to understand Beatrice.

"Never, if you can help it, marry a widower," she said

to a bosom friend. "No one can tell the anxiety a first wife's child is—no one who has not experienced it."

"It must be," said the friend with great feeling.

"If she did not always dress so carefully" continued Lady Clauson sorrowfully, "I should believe she had made up her mind to be an old maid, and might then do something for the boys. She has more money than any young girl should have."

Carruthers called; Carruthers dined at Sir Maingay's, and, moreover, presuming on his distant relationship, Carruthers had the audacity and, after all that had happened, we may say humility, to escort Miss Clauson to an afternoon classical concert. Since last October Frank had a thousand times pictured his meeting with Beatrice and a thousand times settled how he would deport himself. The result was that he forgot all his self-training and bore himself simply as nature prompted him. He was earnest, tender, respectful. More than ever he felt the charm which the girl exercised over him, yet he dared not speak again of love. In his inner heart he knew that for well or ill he must some day resay those passionate words—but not yet. The second cast of the die must, should be, the last. His nearest verbal approach to love-making was this:—

He told Beatrice he had received a letter from Horace begging him to spend a few days at Oakbury before the Lent term began. "It is a great compliment," he said.

"Yes," answered Beatrice, "very great. Are you going?"

"That is for you to decide, not for me."

She dropped her eyes and was silent. Frank waited.

"Do you forbid it?" he asked in that authoritative voice which women love to hear with a man. Still she was silent. He repeated the question.

"I have no right to forbid it," she said.

"You have every right. We do not allude to the past, but we do not forget it. Look up and answer me. Shall I go to Hazlewood?"

Strange to say, he spoke in a commanding way, such as he had never before displayed when addressing her. Per-

haps she liked him none the less for it. With an effort she raised her eyes to his. "It is most unwise," she whispered.

"Unwise you mean for me, of course," he said quickly. "That part is for me to decide, not for you."

She held out her hand impulsively. "We can be friends, Frank," she said.

"Always," answered Carruthers. "And now we may as well settle to go down together."

To this she made no objection, and Frank's love-making ended for the time. His dreams that night may have been pleasant ones; but as for Beatrice, she sat for hours in her room gazing into the fire with a pained, hopeless look on her face. The little line which Frank had once noticed between her brows seemed to have grown deeper and more distinct.

If Carruthers had hoped for a great deal from that journey to Blacktown, he was doomed to be disappointed. Events occurred at Hazlewood House which took Beatrice back in hot haste and alone.

One morning Horace and Herbert were in earnest discussion respecting a hip-bath, the paint of which showed signs of wear. The question was whether it should be sent to the auctioneer's and sold for the best price, or should be re-japanned. Herbert, who was given to temporising, favoured the reparation; Horace, who was more thorough in his ideas, thought it should go at once to the saleroom. The matter was so important and interesting that neither of the brothers heard the sound of 'carriage wheels outside the house. "

The wheels were those belonging to a gig, a genuine unmistakable gig. Whittaker, who saw it come up the drive and stop at the front, not the side door, was much disgusted. He did not know the traditional respectability enjoyed by the driver of a gig. He drew the line at dog-carts. Sylvanus's tricycle was only borne with because it carried a clergyman. "

The gig in question was driven by a man who dismounted and helped to the ground a woman with a good-tempered-looking shiny face, and who was dressed in refreshingly bright

colours. One of them rang the bell timidly, and after a befitting interval the dignified Whittaker condescended to open the door. The man asked if the Messrs. Talbert were in. This collective style jarred upon Whittaker, who had been in the family long enough to remember the time when "Messrs. Talbert and Co." was a well-known form of address. He replied that Mr. Talbert and Mr. Herbert were in, but at present engaged.

"We will wait until they can see us," said the man. So Whittaker let them come into the house. They wiped their feet on entering so carefully and thoroughly that all doubts as to their being persons of any importance were at once set at rest. Whittaker felt he was quite right in offering them chairs in the hall. They were too respectable to be left standing, but the gig and the feet-rubbing combined showed they were not to be ushered into the drawing-room.

"What name shall I say?" he asked.

"We are strangers," said the man. "You can say we have called on private and confidential business."

"You had better give me your name," said Whittaker.

"Mr. and Mrs. Rawlings," answered the woman.

So Whittaker went upstairs, found his masters, and told them that a Mr. and Mrs. Rawlings wanted to see them on private and confidential business.

"Rawlings," said Herbert with a shudder. "We know no one with such an awful name. Who are they, Whittaker?"

"I have no idea, sir," said Whittaker. As his masters adjudged the name horrible, he felt half offended at it being supposed he knew any one named Rawlings.

"Where are they?" asked Horace.

"In the hall, sir." Whittaker felt thankful he had not been tempted to give them sitting-room honours.

"Whittaker," said Horace gravely, "we shall be extremely annoyed if you have let persons come inside our house who are book-hawkers, or, worse still, those who try to buy up second-hand clothes, as these people say they come on private and confidential business."

However, they put their eye-glasses up, and went down

to the hall and confronted their visitors. They found a woman whose philistine attire set their teeth on edge, and a pale-faced man with rather prominent light blue eyes, and a weak-looking agitated kind of face. The brothers wondered mightily what these people could want with them.

"You wish to speak to us?" said Horace suavely. Although they kept persons at a distance as long as possible at arm's-length, the Talberts were always polite and kindly spoken.

"If you please, sir," said the man. Horace and Herbert waited.

"We should like to see you in private," said the woman, glancing round the hall. So Herbert opened the drawing-room door, and they all walked inside. "Now, then," said Horace encouragingly, "what can we do for you, Mr. Rawlings—I believe that is your name?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Rawlings, drawing out a pocket-book, and handing Horace a card, on which was printed, "Rawlings Bros., Purveyors of Pork, 142 Gray Street, London." Horace shivered. He felt very angry.

"Pork," he said, "is a meat we never touch." Then he motioned to Herbert to ring the bell. But Mr. Rawlings interposed. "I didn't come on that sort of business, sir. The fact is, I have heard that some time last year a child, a little boy, was left at your house, sent from no one knows where. Is this correct, gentlemen?"

"It is quite true," answered Horace. He was sorry he had misjudged the man in thinking him a touting tradesman. "But why do you ask?" he added.

The man grew visibly excited. "Me and my wife," he said, "have strong hopes that the little boy is one we lost, or had stolen from us more than two years ago."

The brothers' faces were perfect studies. That two people like this should lay claim to Beatrice's boy was simply absurd. "Impossible!" they ejaculated in one breath.

"Don't say impossible," said Mr. Rawlings. "We may find our little boy at last; we have been hunting about all

over England for foundlings such as this. It may be this one is ours."

"Why should it have been sent here?"

"I can't tell, sir. But I won't leave a stone unturned. May we see the boy?"

The situation was growing ridiculous, and if the Talberts disliked one thing more than another it was a ridiculous situation. The best way out of this one seemed to be that Mr. Rawlings should see the child and be satisfied it was not his missing offspring. So Horace rang the bell and desired that the little boy should be brought down.

Mrs. Miller, the nurse, upon receiving instructions to this effect, imagined that her charge was to be shown to visitors of importance. So she quickly put on his best garments, and made him look very cherubic. He trotted into the drawing-room a cabinet picture of childish health and beauty.

Rawlings looked at him with excitement in every line of his face. His light blue eyes seemed to be starting out of his head. "Maria," he whispered hoarsely to his wife, "look at him. Just what ours would have grown to. The same hair—the same eyes. Maria, is this not your boy? Answer me—and thank Heaven we have at last found him."

The wife looked at the child, but did not answer at once.

"It is—I know it is," said the man. "Tell them so, Maria."

"I hope it is," said his wife.

The Talberts on hearing this looked stupefied. The case was assuming undreamt-of proportions. Dimly they saw that this recognition meant strange things.

"My good man," said Horace, "you are making a complete mistake."

"Oh no, sir—no mistake. How can a father be mistaken? Oh, my pretty boy—my long-lost lamb! Come to me and give me one kiss! Come to your father!"

He shot his arms out so vehemently that Harry was frightened, and instead of accepting the invitation ran to Herbert, and hiding his face against his leg, set up a howl

which brought in Mrs. Miller, who at once whipped him away. She had strict instructions from Beatrice never to let the child become a nuisance. Horace and Herbert with arched eyebrows sat staring at their visitors.

"We may take our little boy back with us at once, sir—may we not?" asked Rawlings.

"Certainly not," said Horace. "You have not given us the slightest proof it is your child."

"But it is, sir. I know, and Maria knows it is."

"Tell us how it came here. Until you can do that we cannot admit your claim for an instant. It is absurd—you must be mistaken."

"Absurd!" echoed Herbert.

"Tell me whose child it is, if it isn't mine?" retorted the man. "Do that, and I will go away. I don't care how it came here. I know it. I recognise it. It is my poor lost little boy, and I will have it."

The man grew more excited than before. Horace was intensely annoyed. He turned to the woman. "You seem to have some sense," he said; "do you claim this child?"

She glanced at her husband and tears sprang into her eyes. "Yes, sir," she said, "I believe it is my child." The situation grew worse and worse. It was well for the boy that he had made such friends of Horace and Herbert or he must have been sacrificed forthwith, if only to rid the house of his self-styled father and mother.

As it was the Talberts temporised; they promised to consider the matter for a few days, and let Mr. Rawlings know the decision they might come to. Mr. Rawlings wrote on his business card the name of an hotel at which he was staying, and having again and again asserted that he would not be robbed of his refound son, at last, to the unspeakable relief of our friends, drove away in his gig.

Never had Horace and Herbert been placed in such a difficulty. They sat stroking their beards for at least half an hour, but could see no way out of it. The arrival of the child on that evening of last year was as nothing compared to the present dilemma. Then, had they chosen to

use it, there was at least a short cut out of the difficulty ; now there was none. The more they thought the more improbable it seemed that these people could be the parents of the boy. And yet the man at least asserted that it was so, as if the matter was beyond doubt. The belief that the child was "some one's" child still clung to both Horace and Herbert. It seemed, moreover, an absolute insult that the child of such persons as Mr. and Mrs. Rawlings should have been sent to Hazlewood House. Why should they have been chosen out of all the world to have this child foisted upon them ? Why did not the unknown sender return it to its rightful home ? The whole claim was a mistake ; whether wilful or accidental, it was a mistake. Fond as they had really grown of the little boy, the Talberts were far too just to think of wishing to keep him from his legitimate owners ; but they had no intention of surrendering him to the first claimant.

Besides, what about Beatrice ? what would she say ? Beatrice, to whom the child seemed as the apple of her eye. Bitterly they blamed themselves for ever having yielded to her request that she might keep the foundling. But what was done, was done, and could not now be helped.

Horace wrote to Beatrice by the next post. He told her that some persons had called and claimed her boy. The whole thing, he said, was a great puzzle to him and to Herbert. They had deferred their decision for a few days. If possible they would do nothing until her return.

Beatrice was alone when she read that letter. She turned deadly pale and seemed to gasp for breath. Then she rang the bell and ordered her things to be packed. At breakfast she quietly told Lady Clauson that she found she must return to Blacktown by the next train. She gave no reason for this abrupt departure, and her sudden determination annoyed Lady Clauson immensely. Sir Maingay said nothing. His daughter had long ago shown him she was entire mistress of her own actions.

"Mark my words," said Lady Clauson as soon as Beatrice had departed ; "that girl will some day do something which will disgrace the family."

"Oh, nonsense, my love," said Sir Maingay, who had now been married long enough to find out that his beautiful wife was not all his fancy had once painted her.

Beatrice reached Hazlewood House quite unexpected. The Talberts were out, so the girl ran straight to the nursery. "Where is my boy?" she cried, so vehemently that she startled Mrs. Miller, who knew nothing of the purport of the visit paid yesterday. The boy was there all safe, and Miss Clauson, without removing her outdoor garments, hugged and caressed her pet until she was told that her uncles had come in. She went to them at once. They greeted her in astonishment.

"What have you done about those wretched people?" she asked quickly. "The people who claim my boy, I mean."

"My dear, we have done nothing as yet."

"You will not dream of giving him up?"

"I hope we shall not be obliged to."

"Listen, Uncle Horace," her cheek flushed as she spoke. "I will give him up to no one—no one at all."

"I am sure, my dear Beatrice, you will be entirely guided by us," said Horace.

"Of course she will," said Herbert kindly. They must have been sanguine men, as the set of Miss Clauson's brow did not promise well for her submitting to guidance of any kind.

"I shall never give up that boy," she said in a firm voice, "until the person who claims it gives every proof that it is his. I would rather run away with him and hide myself."

Horace looked extremely shocked. "My dear Beatrice," he said, "it grieves us both to hear you talk so wildly. The child is a very nice child, but you speak of it as if it were of our own flesh and blood."

Beatrice did not reply to this; but the upshot was that the Talberts promised to write to Mr. Rawlings and say that they held his recognition of a child not seen for more than two years insufficient proof that it was his own, and in the absence of further evidence declined to entertain his

claim. After this Beatrice left them, and for some time they mourned over this new and startling phase of demonstrativeness displayed by one of their own kin.

Two mornings afterwards Horace opened a letter addressed to him in clerkly writing. He read it, and it seemed as if his jaw was about to fall. In silence he handed the letter to Herbert. Herbert read it, and his face reflected his brother's emotion. One glance passed between them and they knew that they were of one mind. Horace turned to Beatrice.

"Beatrice," he said in a voice solemn as the grave, and in a manner decisive as the laws of the Medes and Persians, "that child must be given up."

She started, but before she could speak she heard Herbert's echo, equally solemn and decisive: "Beatrice, that child must be given up."

CHAPTER XVI.

A TAME SURRENDER.

THIS is a true copy of the letter which fell like a bombshell between the gentle and peace-loving Talberts.

“*Blacktown, Dec. 31, 18—*”

“To the Messrs. Horace and Herbert Talbert.

“GENTLEMEN—We have this morning been consulted by Mr. Rawlings with reference to your refusal to restore to him his child, John Rawlings, whom he lost about two years ago in a mysterious manner, and whom he has recently discovered to be living in your house.

“The circumstances as explained to us by our client tend to show that the child was left by some person unknown in a railway carriage; and that it eventually arrived at your house, where, we understand, it has since remained.

“Mr. Rawlings will call at your house on next Saturday afternoon at three o'clock, with a carriage, and we trust you will, without further opposition, allow the child to depart with him.

“In case you still refuse to give up the child, Mr. Rawlings has instructed us to take *immediate* legal action to obtain possession of his son, and we are informed that proper legal proof as to the identity of the boy will be hereafter adduced.

“We are, gentlemen,

“Your obedient servants,

“BLACKETT AND WIGGENS.”

No wonder that after reading the last paragraph, and

realising the fact that the man with the terrible name meant to fight for his offspring, Horace ejaculated, "The child must be given up!" No wonder that Herbert in his turn echoed his brother's exclamation. Unimaginative as they were, a dreadful picture of the consequences of resistance fixed itself on the mental retina of each.

But Beatrice was by far the most agitated of the party. Her cheek grew white; the hand which she mechanically held out for the letter trembled. Herbert gave her the epistolary bombshell, and whilst she read it the two brothers gazed at each other in that sadly calm and gravely reflective way at times natural to men whose minds are made up that a particular path of duty must, at all costs, be trodden to the end. When such a gaze passes from man to man it strengthens the feet of each to tread the stony course.

Beatrice read the letter twice. Without a word she returned it to Herbert; then she walked across the room to the fireplace and stood for some minutes tapping her foot upon the fender. Her back being turned to the Talberts they could not see the supreme emotion shown by her contracted brow and in every line of her set white face. Had they seen it they would have been more than surprised—they would have been shocked. Strong emotion was a thing to be shown by well-bred persons only under the most intense provocation. In this case it was uncalled-for.

Presently the girl turned to them. "You have quite made up your minds to yield to these people's threat?" she asked. There was a curious strained sound in her voice.

"We can do nothing else," answered Horace. Herbert nodded a sad assent to his brother's view of the case.

"Nothing else!" echoed Beatrice with a touch of scorn in her voice. "What right can these people have to the boy? It is not theirs. Uncle Horace, Uncle Herbert, you can remember how he was sent here. How beautifully dressed he was—how thoroughly cared for. Can you, can any one for a moment imagine him as belonging to such persons? What are they? Pork butchers, you said."

"Purveyors," interpolated Horace, who loved to be precise.

"How is it possible he can be their child?" urged Beatrice.

"People in any station of life may have children, my dear," said Herbert, uttering the truism like a newly-found proverb of Solomon.

"And," said Horace, speaking more to the point, "the broad fact remains that they claim the child, and are prepared to make that claim good before the magistrates."

The most accomplished jack-of-all-trades generally breaks down when he interprets law—Horace was no exception. Had he known that Messrs. Blackett and Wiggins could only obtain possession of their client's child by a writ of *habeas corpus* or some such mysterious operation in a civil court, he might have felt more inclined to disregard the threat of "immediate legal action." As it was, his ignorance of criminal law interpreted the vague threat as conveying the awful terrors of a magisterial summons. His mistake shows how much better it would be for the general public if they consulted solicitors in every emergency—and how much better for solicitors!

"Before the magistrates, my dear Beatrice," echoed Herbert, dutifully accepting his brother's version of the law.

"Tell them to do so—tell them to prove their right," said Beatrice.

The brothers held up their long shapely hands in horror. "My dear Beatrice," said Horace with the solemnity of a bishop rebuking a curate, "for Heaven's sake be reasonable—we only ask you to be reasonable. How can we possibly appear before the bench and contest this claim? Fancy the talk—the ridicule! You must see the utter absurdity of your suggestion—the utter impossibility of our compliance."

"Yes, Beatrice, I am sure you must see it," said Herbert.

If Miss Clauson was misguided enough not to see the absurdity and impossibility of the course she wished her uncles to take, I am sure she stands alone in her darkness. Horace and Herbert haled before the county justices, charged by a purveyor of pork, named Rawlings, with

unlawfully detaining the said purveyor's son and heir, would have made not only the hair of Oakbury but also the hair of a portion of Blacktown stand on end. Think how the families of position would have laughed! Think how annoyed and bitter the wiseacres who were sure the child was "somebody" would have felt when the lowly parentage was revealed! And even if Mr. Rawlings failed to substantiate his claim there would be scandal. People would ask why the Talberts were so anxious to keep possession of this little stranger? Beatrice's strange fancy for the boy would not be a sufficient explanation. The Talberts knew the world and its pettiness and wicked tongue. Once they had braved it in deference to a whim of Beatrice's, but the matter was now far too serious to take a girl's whim into account. They saw that one course only was open to them. When Mr. Rawlings's carriage came to the door, little Harry must forthwith be placed in it.

But Miss Clauson still continued unreasonable. She even returned to the attack. "I do not see it at all," she said. "If this man laid claim to one of your fields you would not give it up."

"A field does not arrive unexpectedly in the middle of the night," said Horace—not humorously, but as one who states a simple fact.

"Take a better simile, my dear," said Herbert. "Suppose you picked up a sovereign in the street and a man came up and swore it was his. Although you might have every reason to doubt his assertion you would, I am sure, give it up in order to avoid unseemly dispute."

"I don't think I should," said Beatrice defiantly.

"Oh yes, my dear, you would," said Horace gravely.

"I am sure of it," added Herbert.

Beatrice did not pursue Herbert's ingenious argument further. "Nothing—no entreaty of mine will make you change your minds?" she asked. The brothers shook their heads sadly. It was painful to them to refuse her request, but their grave eyes looked into the distance and saw all the horrors which they imagined a contest with Mr. Rawlings would arouse. Beatrice knew that any further appeal would

be waste of breath. "I must go and think," she said wearily, as she turned away from the arbiters of the boy's fate.

"I may say," said Horace, with a slight blush on his cheek, "that we both regret the necessity of this surrender. As a rule we are not fond of children, but your little friend has been very good, and had it been possible we would willingly have given him house-room until his future was assured."

Beatrice took his hand and pressed it. "Thank you," she said gratefully. Then she passed through the door which Herbert held open, an act of politeness which not even the relationship of uncle and niece, or the proverbial contempt bred by familiarity, allowed the Talberts to forget.

The brothers resumed their seats, and for a while silence reigned. The truth is they felt angry and annoyed, perhaps even self-reproachful. Impossible as it was that Mr. Rawlings's claims could be contested, both Horace and Herbert felt a sense of shame natural to any Englishman who finds himself compelled to yield by a mere threat. The wish to fight everything out to the bitter end made England what it is. Perhaps, after all, when they came to think of it, the Talberts were fonder of the child than they cared to own. At any rate, after a long brown study, Herbert, at least, showed signs of wavering.

"I suppose," he asked, as one seeking for information, "it would be out of the question for us to do as Beatrice wishes?"

Horace was equal to the occasion. "Quite out of question," he answered sternly. "We should be placed in a ridiculous position, and become the jest of the county."

They shuddered visibly at the thought, and so far as the Talberts were concerned the boy's fate was settled. To become the jest of the county is too terrible! Country wit, as we all know, is so delicate, yet so sharp and pointed!

With minds ill at ease they sought distraction in their housekeeping. Although as a rule the "Tabbies" were just, if cheese-paring in their management,—not unreasonable, if exacting in their requirements,—to-day they drove

the cook and poor Whittaker almost frantic, and set both wondering "whatever the masters were going to get to?"

In the meantime Beatrice had carried her white face to her own room. She locked the door, threw herself upon a couch, where for a long time she sat with her hands pressed against her brows. She did not weep, nor was her look that of one resigning herself to fate and getting ready to yield to the inevitable. It was rather that of one searching for and exploring every path which might possibly offer a way of escape from a difficulty. But it seemed as if every path she trod mentally resolved itself into a *cul de sac*, for the girl heaved a hopeless sigh and the tears at last began to force themselves through her half-closed lashes.

She rose, rang the bell, and gave orders for the boy to be brought to her. He soon ran into the room with the cry of delight with which he always greeted her. Miss Clauson took the little fellow on her lap, clasped him to her heart, stroked and curled his pretty, ruffled bright hair, called him by a thousand endearing names and strange diminutives, kissed him on his lips, his eyes, his neck, his dimpled arms and fat legs, and generally went through the well-known ceremony of child-worship. It was clear that no legal menace, however dire, would make her acquiesce in the tame surrender of her pet contemplated by her uncles. Not one of her many and rather wild ejaculations so much as hinted at the possibility of an impending separation. In no sense were her caresses, some of which were tearful ones, intended as a farewell.

By and by, with a face even paler than before, Beatrice took the child by the hand and went downstairs. She paused for a second before the closed door of the room in which she had left her uncles. "I can see no other way. It must be done," she muttered. Then like one full of a solemn purpose she entered the room. Whatever she may have been about to do, the empty room seemed to give her a welcome respite. She gave a breath of relief. Nevertheless, it seemed that the respite was to be but short, for, after waiting a few minutes and finding neither Horace nor Herbert appear, she turned as if to go in search of them.

But at that moment her mood changed once more, or an alternative course at last presented itself. A tinge of colour leapt back to her cheek. With quick steps she led the boy away, and having consigned him to Mrs. Miller's care, again sought her own room, and again sat for a long time in deep thought. "It is but a slender chance," she whispered, "but it can be tried. To-day is Thursday, and no steps are to be taken until Saturday."

After this she wrote a note to Sylvanus Mordle, asking him if he could come to the house and see her either that afternoon or early the next morning. She sent the note down to the village and then went in search of her uncles.

They looked at her rather timidly, perhaps conscience-stricken. They fancied she had come to renew her argument and offer up fresh entreaties. It may be they feared that in such an event they would be forced to yield, in spite of the consequences such an act of weakness must entail. But Beatrice did not reopen the attack. She quietly asked if she might have the clothes worn by the boy when he first disturbed the seclusion of Hazlewood House; which clothes, it may be remembered, were carefully stowed away by Horace in the big safe. As there appeared to be no harm in the gratifying of this request, the safe was unlocked, and a neat, brown paper parcel endorsed in Horace's long slim caligraphy given to the girl.

"You will not answer the solicitor's letter, I hope," she said.

"No; it needs no answer. The delivery of the boy will be answer enough."

In the afternoon Sylvanus trotted up on his tricycle. His face was radiant from the combined effects of the sharp, fresh air, the exercise, and the delight at having received such a summons from Miss Clauson. To-day he was leagues above his lugubrious name. He clapped his hands together, not so much for the purpose of promoting circulation as on account of the cheerful sound of the detonations made by the meeting palms. He wished old Whittaker a happy New Year in a way which clearly implied that happy years were the rule, sad ones the exception. Whittaker returned the

greeting with due respect, and ventured to express his approval of Mr. Mordle's Christmas Day sermon. Then Mordle said something which made even Whittaker laugh. Miss Clauson heard the curate's brisk, crisp voice long before he was shown into the drawing-room.

He greeted her pleasantly, and learned that her uncles were out. As the Talberts always took their out-of-door exercise of an afternoon, this news was no surprise to him. Who shall say that Sylvanus did not time his call by their well-known clockwork habits? A *tête-à-tête* is often pleasant although the two heads harbour no thoughts save those of friendship.

"You want me," said Sylvanus. "Behold me. Here I am."

"I want you to do me a favour, so I ventured to write to you." Beatrice's words were conventional, but there was something in her manner which made the quick-witted curate wonder.

"Command me—in anything—everything—all." He spoke even more quickly and emphatically than was his wont. In his heart the good fellow fancied his aid was needed for something concerning Carruthers, whom he persisted in believing Beatrice loved. Nevertheless, he would willingly have done all he could to help to happiness the man who had taken every vestige of hope from him.

But the favour resolved itself into this. Would Mr. Mordle accompany Miss Clauson to-morrow morning to Blacktown? She had a private errand which took her to a part of the city of which she knew little or nothing. Sylvanus felt and expressed himself greatly honoured. At what time should he call for her? Would she walk or drive? Beatrice looked at him, and spoke very slowly and as if with an effort.

"I wish no one—not even my uncles—to know of this excursion," she said. "Would you meet me at the cross-roads at ten o'clock to-morrow morning? If I trespass on your time or good-nature please say so."

"Trespass! By no means. Ten o'clock. I shall be waiting for you."

Nevertheless Sylvanus was surprised, even troubled. To have refused to do Miss Clauson a service, whatever it might be, was of course out of the question, but being open as the day in all his comings and goings, he had a dislike to any proceedings which savoured of the mysterious. "Errand of charity, of course?" he said, making the questioning assertion not for curiosity but as a salve to his conscience.

"It is an errand of no evil," said Beatrice gravely. Her words satisfied Sylvanus as the words of a fair woman always satisfy the conscience of a man. The amount of conviction carried by beauty is truly wonderful.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CASE FOR KING SOLOMON.

AT a few minutes past ten o'clock in the morning Sylvanus Mordle, who for some quarter of an hour had been waiting at the cross-roads as patiently as the finger-post itself, saw Beatrice coming towards him. He hastened to meet her, and his sharp eyes at once noticed that she looked worn and weary. Had he known that she had spent a sleepless night this would have caused him no surprise. The two walked on until they reached the outskirts of the city. Here, by Beatrice's command, the curate hailed a cab. "Where shall we drive to?" he asked.

"There, if you please," said Beatrice, handing him a paper. Mordle stared, and could scarcely repress a cry of surprise. The paper bore the words, "The Cat and Compasses, Market Lane." He wondered what in the world Miss Clauson could want at a fifth-rate Blacktown inn. However, he gave the order, and in due time the cab drew up at its euphonical destination.

The "Cat and Compasses" was an inn which had seen better, much better days, on the strength of which it still ventured to call itself a family and commercial hotel. Perhaps it spoke the truth; perhaps its assertion was but a laudable evidence of a desire to regain its former status. It stood in a narrow street very near to Blacktown market, and, judging by external appearance, was the very last place at which either a family, or even one of those dashing representatives of commerce of our day, would dream of staying. It boasted a billiard-room built over a stable at the back, and approached by a step-ladder. Saving this,

its attractions were few, beyond the gay-looking bottles and neat little kegs ranged temptingly on shelves above a battered but bright pewter counter—a cheerful gauntlet to be run by all who entered the house itself. What could bring Miss Clauson to such a place?

Simply this: the widowed landlady of the house was an old friend of Mr. and Mrs. Rawlings. These respectable people were staying with her, and Beatrice had learnt the address given to her uncles. Her business was to see Mrs. Rawlings.

As the cab stopped Sylvanus, who knew nothing of the claim made on little Harry's person, looked inquiringly at his companion. He saw that Beatrice had at a glance taken in the rather disreputable look of the "Cat and Compasses," which was doubtless unfairly enhanced by a man with a sodden, gin-besieged face, who leant against the doorpost smoking a short pipe. He saw, moreover, that Beatrice appeared agitated. "You were right not to come alone," he said.

"Will you step in and ask if a lady can see a Mrs. Rawlings, who is staying there?" Mordle obeyed.

Beatrice drew down her veil, and leaned back in the cab. She closed her eyes as if for the moment to shut out her surroundings. "It must be done!" she murmured. Her eyes were still closed when she heard Mordle, his clear accents just tempered by surprise, saying that the person she wanted was in the house and would see her. Beatrice moved as if to leave the cab. The curate kept the door closed.

"Miss Clauson," he said, "can I not do your errand for you? This seems scarcely the place for you to enter."

He spoke more gravely than usual. His mind was picturing the consternation into which Horace and Herbert would be thrown did they but know that their niece was visiting such a place as this. He felt he was betraying a trust, and until he could assure himself that the end more than justified the means would be ill at ease.

"No," said Beatrice, "I alone can do it. Please do not follow me; but I should be glad if you will wait for me."

Very reluctantly he opened the cab-door, and with many misgivings watched Beatrice go past the sodden-faced man, who cast after her a look of maudlin approval ; he watched her go past the coloured bottles and the pewter counter, and disappear from sight. As she vanished, Sylvanus, who was shrewd enough to feel that it would be moral ruin for a clergyman, especially one who was but a curate, to be seen at such an hour of the morning hanging about the door of such a tavern, ensconced himself in the depths of the cab, and waited and wondered. He honestly believed that whatever might be the mission which brought Beatrice to such a place, its object was perfectly pure and womanly. Yet he was unhappy, and felt guilty. Horace and Herbert sat heavily on his conscience. Charitable as he knew them to be, prompted by charity as he persuaded himself was Beatrice's unknown errand, he was fully aware that no milk of human kindness possessed by the Talberts would induce them to consent to their niece's exercising the sacred quality in such dingy purlieus, or under the roof of such a questionable establishment as the "Cat and Compasses." The limits of the charitable obligations of Hazlewood House were strictly defined by the boundaries of Oakbury parish.

At the end of the gleaming pewter counter Beatrice encountered the widowed landlady, whose frame, expansive after the manner of widowed landladies, filled up the narrow passage. She eyed Miss Clauson curiously, and then conducted her to a snug parlour at the back of the bar. Inn parlours of this sort are always cosy and warm. This was no exception to the rule. A cosy, low room, and not without cheerful ornaments, seeing that it boasted a large tea-tray inlaid with mother-of-pearl, several coloured prints, and a handsomely-framed copper-plate written document, which proclaimed to all who cared to read it that the deceased proprietor was a member of the Ancient Order of Oddfellows.

Beatrice noticed none of these artistic embellishments. She took the chair which was offered her, and, without raising her veil, awaited the appearance of Mrs. Rawlings. As no woman with any pretensions to respectability and solvency would think of facing an unknown visitor without

some little smoothing of plumes and adjustment of attire, Miss Clauson had to wait several minutes for the desired audience. At last she heard the door open, and with a stifled sob she rose, turned, and faced the new-comer.

Mrs. Rawlings's good-natured, round, commonplace face wore an expression of wonderment. She saw that her visitor was of a class different from that which usually honoured her with a morning call. As a tribute to Miss Clauson's undeniably ladylike appearance, the good woman's greeting, which began with a nod, ended in something like a curtsy.

"Please be seated, miss," she said. "I hear you want to speak to me."

"Yes," said Beatrice, in a low but clear voice. "I wish to speak to you about the child which you claim as yours. I wish to hear what you have to say."

The woman's face grew grave. "Ah," she said, "I must send for my husband. He's managing the business."

Beatrice made an imperious gesture of dissent. "What I have to say must be said to you. Kindly see that we speak without interruption." Mrs. Rawlings settled back in her chair rather sullenly, and eyed her veiled visitor with increased curiosity. Suddenly Beatrice again spoke.

"Tell me," she said, in tones of strong reproach, and, perhaps unwisely, scorn—"tell me why you dare to claim as your own a child whom you saw for the first time a few days ago?"

Mrs. Rawlings seemed troubled. She could not see her visitor's eyes, but had the uncomfortable feeling that they were gazing sternly at her, as if striving to read the truth in her perturbed features.

"We lost a little boy," she faltered out, "a dear little boy of that age. My man is certain this is ours."

"But you—you are not certain. A man may make a mistake as to his own child, but not a woman. The mother does not forget her child, or believe the child of a stranger to be her own."

"My man is so certain," repeated Mrs. Rawlings, "he must be right. Poor fellow, ever since our boy was lost he has been seeking him, high and low. It has driven him all

but mad at times. Now he has found the child, and means to have him." She spoke the last sentence somewhat defiantly.

"He will never have him," said Beatrice slowly. "Listen to me. There is no chance of your obtaining that boy. His mother knows in whose hands he is. If your claim is pressed, proof as to whose the child really is will be forthcoming. The production will cause pain and grief, but that will be borne, if needful. See here"—she drew from her pocket the label which had been cut off the child's cape—"the person who has a right to that child must produce the half of the card which fits this. When wanted it can be produced."

"I know nothing about cards and proofs," said the woman, whose understanding could not, perhaps, grasp the ingenuity of the device. "All I know is this, miss: my husband swears it is our boy, and I believe him, poor man. Sore enough he has grieved for two years—never been the same man since."

"You do not believe him," said Beatrice, in the same deliberate way, "but for the sake of setting his mind at rest, you humour his delusion, and are willing to rob another woman. You seem to be a kind woman, yet you are ready to work irretrievable harm to another."

"I mean no harm to any one, miss. If it shouldn't be my child, the mother can't be of much account who could desert a pretty little dear like that. But there, I've listened too long, and perhaps said more than I ought. If you like to see my husband, I'll send for him."

Mrs. Rawlings rose as if to terminate the audience. Beatrice also rose and faced her. She threw up her veil, and for the first time during the interview showed her face to her companion.

"No," she said, with strange vehemence; "I have more, much more, to say to you. Look me in the face, and feel sure that I am speaking the truth. What if I tell you that I know the mother of this child—know why it was sent to Hazlewood House—know that if forced to do so the mother will claim it publicly—will face whatever the

shame, rather than yield it to another. Will these things have weight with you, and make you persuade your husband to let the matter rest?"

Her impassioned manner had its effect upon her listener. Mrs. Rawlings fidgeted about, and her round eyes, which hitherto had rested wonderingly on Beatrice's face, were cast down.

"It's no use," she muttered, shaking her head. "Not a bit of use. He has set his heart on the boy. He'll say it's only a trick."

"Then I have yet more to say. Look at me again, and listen. Put yourself in my place, and realise what you compel me to do. I tell you the child is mine—it is mine. Do you understand?"

Mrs. Rawlings shook her head feebly.

"It is mine," repeated Beatrice. "I am its mother. Do I speak clearly enough? That boy is my son. I bore him in trouble and in secrecy. Now will you or your husband dare to lay claim to him—dare to swear it belongs to you? Answer me!"

"Oh dear! Oh dear, dear!" ejaculated Mrs. Rawlings. Beatrice's face was pale as death. She breathed quickly as one in pain. Now that her hand was forced, now that the guarded secret of her life was wrested from her, she seemed to speak like one who having told the worst cares little what follows.

"Save myself and one other no one knows of its birth. I loved it and longed to have it ever with me. But for years I scarcely dared to see it. Then came a chance. I schemed so that it might come to me and be always with me, and yet no one need know it was my very own. I injured no one by so doing. I had my child, and could love it and care for it. I was all but happy. And now for what can be of no benefit to you, you will force me to tell my tale to the world or part with my child. Yet you are a woman, and must have a woman's heart!"

She looked at Mrs. Rawlings, and saw that tears were in her eyes.

"I believe you are kind," continued Beatrice in a softer

voice. "You have forced me to tell you all. But I believe you will keep my secret and help me to keep it." She did not mean to sue, nevertheless there was an imploring tone in her voice. Mrs. Rawlings clasped her plump hands together; the tears streamed down her cheeks. In spite of years of practice in plaiting up those mysterious white integuments whose fanciful shapes adorn shops where pork is sold, the worthy woman was still humane at heart.

"Oh my poor young lady! My poor young lady!" she cried. "You so young, so proud-looking, so beautiful! To be led astray! Oh dear! oh dear! What villains men are, both high and low!"

Miss Clauson flushed to the roots of her hair. She seemed about to speak, but checked herself. "You are satisfied now?" she asked after a pause.

"Oh yes, miss. Oh, I am so sorry for you. You were right to trust me. Not a word shall pass my lips."

"But your husband?"

"Oh dear! oh dear! I must do the best I can. I must tell him it is not ours. He will be so unhappy. He's a good man and a kind husband, but rather excitable. I assure you, miss, he was fully convinced that sweet little boy was his. I own I wasn't, but I humoured him seeing the thought made him so happy. Any way I would have loved the boy like my own. Now I promise you there shall be no more trouble. But my poor man, he will be disappointed."

"Will any sum of money——" began Beatrice rather timidly.

"Oh no, miss. Although Rawlings has neglected business dreadfully for the last two years, and his brother is grumbling, we are fairly well-to-do people with a tidy bit saved. Oh no, my man is single-eyed. He only wanted his boy."

"How was your child lost?" asked Beatrice.

Mrs. Rawlings looked rather confused. "I can't help believing, miss, that the poor little fellow was drowned and never found. But Rawlings, he won't have it so. He says he was stolen, and we shall find him some day."

After this Miss Clauson thanked her hostess with grave dignity. Then she dropped her veil and, attended by Mrs. Rawlings, went back to the cab and Sylvanus. She had gained her end, but at a price only known to herself. What it had cost her to reveal the secret of her life to that strange woman can scarcely be overestimated. Such was her feeling of degradation that she almost wished that her uncles had been in the room when yesterday she went with the child in her hand to tell them what she had to-day told Mrs. Rawlings. "And after all," she murmured with a bitter smile on her face, "it is but staving off the crash which must come sooner or later." Here she sighed involuntarily. Mordle's quick ear caught the sound. "Nothing unpleasant happened, I hope?" he asked.

"My business was not of the pleasantest nature, but I accomplished it successfully," replied Beatrice.

He said no more. By her desire she was set down at one of the principal shops in Blacktown, an emporium of articles of feminine need into which Mordle could not venture to accompany her. She thanked him for his services, and he knew that those thanks were a dismissal. He strode back to Oakbury looking very thoughtful; indeed it was not until he was well into his own parish that he remembered the necessity of resuming his usual cheerful air. "It must have been charitable," he muttered. "But why the secrecy? Why the 'Cat and Compasses'?"

Saturday came. All that morning, the busiest of the week, Horace and Herbert were fidgety and uncomfortable. Long before the hour fixed by Messrs. Blackett and Wiggins for the appearance of their clients carriage, the brothers were glancing down the drive. Miss Clauson, however, appeared calm and at her ease. Her woman's instinct told her that all danger from the claimants was at an end. About two o'clock Horace turned to her. "My dear," he said, "has Mrs. Miller made any preparation for the child's departure?"

"None whatever. He will not be sent for. It was but an idle threat."

Horace and Herbert exchanged glances. They knew it

was no idle threat, but they little knew how the fulfilment had been averted.

Three o'clock came—four—five o'clock; but no carriage, no Rawlings, no Blackett, no Wiggons. Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday passed without any sign or manifestation of hostility. The Talberts were then bound to confess that their niece had judged aright.

"Beatrice appears to be remarkably clear-sighted," said Horace.

"Remarkably so," answered Herbert.

But had Sylvanus Mordle, who spent the evening with them, committed a breach of faith and mentioned his excursion with Miss Clauson, the brothers might have suspected they had credited their niece with a quality to which she had no title.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SWEETS OF LIBERTY.

"OH, Liberty! thou goddess heavenly bright! Profuse of bliss and pregnant with delight." Every bard has sung the joys of liberty; every writer has said his say upon her glories. Patriots have died for her, and statesmen—modern ones especially—have made her a convenient stalking-horse. The subject being such a stock one, and apt quotations so plentiful, there is no need to dilate upon the frame of mind in which Mrs. Miller's acquaintance, Mr. Maurice Hervey, late No. 1080, found himself when Portland prison at length discontinued its ungrudging and machine-like hospitality and restored him to the outer world, a free man save for the formality of once a month reporting himself to the police, and that general suspicious surveillance which is so irksome to the usually modest and retiring nature of a ticket-of-leave man.

The "goddess heavenly bright" showed her face, the first time for some years, to Maurice Hervey on the very day when Miss Clauson and Sylvanus Mordle went to Blacktown.

Mrs. Miller, who had manifested so keen an interest in the felon's enlargement, remained in complete ignorance of the happy event. This was due to no omission on her part. She had written twice to the governor of Portland, begging that the date of the convict's release might be made known to her. The letters were dated not from Oakbury, but from some place in London. The first letter was duly acknowledged, and the information vouchsafed that the date could not be exactly fixed. To the second

letter she received no reply. The reason for such apparent discourtesy was this :—

The day of the man's emancipation was drawing very near, so he was told that his friend had written, and he was asked if he wished to be sent to London to meet her? He cast down his eyes and in a respectful way stated that he was sorry to say that he attributed his present shameful position to certain evil counsel which the writer had given him, and which he had followed. He did wish to be sent to London, but would rather avoid this woman than seek her. After this avowal Mrs. Miller's letter remained unanswered.

He was an educated villain who had been sentenced to five years' penal servitude for uttering forged bills. Like most such men who are sent into seclusion for the good of the community, Maurice Hervey was able to realise, without such severe treatment as was needed to convince the Apostle Paul, that kicking against pricks is foolishness. He had been ordered to pay society a certain debt. Misbehaviour meant that the debt would be exacted to the uttermost farthing; whereas good conduct would in time lighten the obligation and induce his creditor to accept a handsome composition. So he did to the best of his ability such work as was allotted to him. He was too clever to attempt the elbow-worn trick of interesting the chaplain by a pretended conversion. He sagely reflected that chaplains must by this time have grown wide awake. But he wore a contented inoffensive look, spoke civilly to his gaolers, complained of nothing and gave no trouble. It was only in the seclusion of his circumscribed cell of corrugated iron that No. 1080 scowled, grated his teeth, and clenched his hands. It was only there that while his heart craved for personal freedom, his lips noiselessly framed bitter curses and vows of vengeance.

So it is that if upon his return to freedom Mr. Hervey had given his experiences of penal servitude to the daily papers, his description of the punishment of bread and water diet, dark cells, and that humiliating exercise with the crank, known as "grinding the air," would have had no first-hand value.

Before leaving Portland he was told that the "Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society" would doubtless do something for him. He expressed his gratitude for the information, but added that unless from disuse his right hand had lost its cunning, he could earn an honest—he emphasised the word—livelihood without difficulty. He had been an artist, and could again pursue that craft under a new name. During his detention he had given his janitors proof of his graphic abilities, by the graving of sundry slates with complicated and not inartistic designs. These works of art are still shown to visitors to the prison as curiosities.

So, practically a free man, Maurice Hervey stood in the streets of London at four o'clock on the second day of the new year. There was little about him to attract attention. By a merciful and sensible dispensation, during the three months prior to his emancipation, a convict's hair is left to nature, so that in these days of military crops, Mr. Hervey's head, which no longer resembled a Fitzroy storm-drum, was not a signal of danger. The suit of clothes which replaced the durable prison dress was rough and ill-fitting, but not such as to create remark. In London that night there must have been hundreds of thousands of respectable men who looked neither better nor worse than Maurice Hervey.

Free at last! Free to turn where he liked, and, within the limits of the law, do as he liked; in splendid health; in the prime of manhood. Free to redeem or cancel the past by honest work, or by dishonesty sink lower and lower in the future. In his pocket the sum of five pounds seventeen shillings and sixpence, the result of years of self-enforced good conduct and unavoidable hard labour. The fingering of this money gave him a new, or at least awoke a dormant sensation. It was more than four years since his hands had touched a coin of the realm. Think of that and realise what penal servitude means!

The first use he made of his liberty and money was characteristic, and I fear may awaken indulgent sympathy in the minds of the majority of man- (not woman-) kind. He went into a tobacconist's and bought a ninepenny cigar. He lit it, sat down upon a chair in the shop, and

for some minutes smoked in blissful contented silence. The shopkeeper eyed his customer narrowly. His general appearance, especially the look of his hands, did not seem compatible with what the tradesman called "a ninepenny smoke gent." Hervey caught the man's eyes fixed on his hands. He himself glanced at them with a look of disgust and a muttered curse. Years of turf-carrying and digging and delving for Portland stone play havoc with a gentleman's hands. Hervey's nails were broken, blunted and stunted; his fingers were thickened and hardened. Altogether his hands were such as a person solicitous as to the refinement of his personal appearance would prefer to keep in his pockets.

There were other actions which showed the ticket-of-leave man to be possessed of a fastidious nature. The first enthralling solemnity of the refound enjoyment of good tobacco having passed off, he left the shop and went in search of a ready-made clothing establishment. Here he bought a shirt and collar, a pair of shining boots, a hat, gloves, and a cheap suit which for a few days would hang together and present an appearance almost fashionable. He asked permission to change his apparel on the premises. Then having had a brown paper parcel made of the suit presented to him by a generous government, he went his way, no doubt much relieved by the amelioration of his external condition.

After a few more purchases needed by a gentleman for his toilet, he found his money had dwindled down to very little. He had, however, enough left to buy a shiny black bag. Into this he tumbled his parcels, and hailing a hansom, paid his last shilling to be conveyed to the door of a well-known hotel. A luxurious dog this convict!

He engaged a bedroom. He ordered a dinner of which even Horace and Herbert might have approved. He rang for hot water, and spent half an hour soaking his hardened and disfigured hands. He scowled as he realised the painful fact that hundreds of gallons of hot water and months of time must be expended before these badly-used members in any way resumed their original appearance.

Then, without a shilling in his pocket, he went to his dinner, with which he drank a bottle of champagne. It is clear that Mr. Hervey, late 1080, had liberal views as to the treatment due to himself. He had, moreover, a lot of leeway to make up.

He spent the evening smoking the hotel cigars, and drinking the hotel whisky and water. Pleasant as these occupations were, he retired to rest early. Whilst he had been soaking his hands, he had cast longing eyes upon the beauties of the white-covered bed, and had mentally contrasted its soft charms with the asperities of the strip of sacking which had for so long been his resting-place. Sweet, truly sweet, are the uses of adversity when they teach a man to enjoy the simple comforts of life as Maurice Hervey that night enjoyed his bed. He revelled in the clean white sheets, he nestled on the soft mattress and yet softer pillows. The profusion of blankets filled his soul with a rapturous warmth. And as he fully realised the contrast between the innocent luxury he was enjoying and the discomforts of an iron cell eight feet by four, he vowed a very proper vow, that no ill-advised conduct of his own should force him to renew his acquaintance with prison fare and discipline. The love of luxury has saved many a man from going wrong.

"Besides," he murmured, as he sank off to sleep, "there is no need for foolery of that kind. I am master of the situation. I can eat, drink, and be merry for the rest of my life." There are many men who would sleep the sounder had they such a thought to rock them.

In the morning, after breakfast,¹ it occurred to Hervey that a moneyless man staying at an hotel is in rather a precarious position. Pleasant as was his newly-found liberty, there was work to be done before he could with a clear conscience enjoy it. So he sallied forth, trudged through a number of streets, and at last reached a quiet back road full of unpretending little houses. At one of these houses he inquired for a Miss Martin, who had lodged there some four or five years ago. Miss Martin, he was informed, had left ever so long—left without giving an address. Hervey's

heart grew sick. In his haste to once more taste the luxuries of life he had been too precipitate. He knew that unless he could find the person he wanted, it would have been better for him to have kept his good conduct money intact.

The woman of the house, who noticed his dismay, added that the shop at the corner might know what had become of Miss Martin; so to the shop he went. He was in luck. He learned that his friend lived about a mile away; moreover, that she was now Mrs. Humphreys. As he heard this supplementary piece of news, the man laughed so curiously that the shopwoman eyed him askance.

He walked to the new address, that of another little house in another quiet street. He knocked. A good-looking, respectable young woman, carrying a baby, and followed by a toddling child, opened the door. She gave a low cry, and staggered back against the wall. Hervey raised his hat with mock politeness, and without invitation entered the house. The woman called to some one, who came and relieved her of her children. She then opened the door of a sitting-room, into which she followed her visitor. Hervey threw himself on a chair, and looked at the woman with a satirical smile. As yet not a word had passed between them. The man was the first to break the silence.

"Well, Fanny," he said mockingly, "so you are married, and have forgotten me?"

"No; I am trying to forget you." She spoke bitterly.

"And you can't. That's a compliment, considering the years of separation."

The woman looked at him in the face. "Maurice," she said, "I am married. I married a kind, true man, who loves me, and works for me and for our children. He knew a great deal, not all about my past, yet he took me and trusts me. You will sneer when I tell you I am trying to be a good woman and a good wife. You always sneered at anything good. But, Maurice, for the sake of what we were once to each other, spare me now. Let me live in peace, and see you no more."

She spoke in solemn earnest, such earnestness that the man's light laugh seemed discordant. "My dear girl," he said, "I have no wish to tempt your feet from the paths of domestic virtue—no wish to harm you. I have finer fish to fry. But you may remember that when certain circumstances rendered it imperative—curse it! I can speak plainly to you—when I learnt that the warrant was out, when I knew that the game was up, I placed a little packet in your fond hands to keep until better times. Where is it?"

The woman flushed, and for a moment did not answer. Her prayer for mercy had been genuine; her wish to see him no more an honest utterance; but years ago she had given this man all a woman has to give—given it without consideration, without price. And now, so far as he was concerned, the only memory of the past which linked them together was but of a certain thing left in her charge.

He saw the flush, saw the hesitation, and, of course, attributed both to the wrong motive. His brow grew black. "By G—d!" he cried; "if it is not forthcoming——"

She burst into tears. "Wait," she said, quitting the room abruptly, and leaving her visitor in dire suspense. In a few minutes she returned and handed him a small sealed packet.

"There it is—just as you gave it to me that night," she said. "Many a time when I've been hard pressed and did not know where to turn to for a shilling I tried to persuade myself that you meant me to use it in case of need. But I knew you too well, Maurice—I knew you too well!"

Hervey paid no heed to her last words, the scorn conveyed by which should have brought the blood to the cheek of any man of decent feelings. He tore the parcel open. It contained a gold watch and chain, two valuable diamond rings, and about a hundred and fifty sovereigns. He placed the watch in his fob, then tried to draw the rings on his fingers. Neither would pass over his enlarged knuckles, so with a curse he shovelled them along with the gold into his pocket. The woman watched him sadly.

"Thank you, my dear," he said airily. "I knew I could trust you. By the bye, perhaps you're hard up

Have some—I can get plenty more.” He held out some gold to her.

“Not a farthing. Your gold would burn me.”

“Will you give me a kiss for the sake of old times? Fancy! it is more than four years since my lips have touched a woman’s.”

She made an emphatic gesture of dissent. “It would be well for some women,” she said, “if your lips had never touched theirs.”

He laughed an unpleasant laugh. “Well, good-bye then, if we are not to rake up old fires. Remember me to your respectable husband. Keep yourself unspotted from the world, and train up your children in the way they should go. Farewell.”

He swung out of the house whistling a merry tune in vogue when his incarceration began. “Now,” he said, “that I have money enough to last a long time, I can make my own terms. Grim want won’t push me into a corner. Now, you jade, I’ll make you bend your proud knees!”

He grated his strong teeth and stamped his foot—the latter so violently and viciously that a timid old gentleman who was close by him started off at an accelerated pace in the direction of a distant policeman.

Hervey hung about London for a few days. He made considerable additions to his wardrobe, was an excellent customer of the hotel, he patronised several theatres, and generally enjoyed himself. He was not altogether idle, part of his time being taken up in making a series of inquiries which it took some trouble to get answered. At last he learned what he wanted to know. “So near!” he muttered. “I feared I should have to look out of England.” Forthwith he paid his hotel bill, and carrying with him the respect of the proprietor, left the house. Evening found him in comfortable quarters in the smoky old city known as Blacktown.

CHAPTER XIX.

“IT HAS COME!”

AT Blacktown Maurice Hervey did not favour an hotel with his custom. Perhaps he mistrusted the capabilities possessed by the Blacktown hotels for furnishing him with luxuries such as, after so protracted and enforced an abstinence, he felt to be rightly his due. Perhaps he sighed for the quietude and repose with which one usually associates a private house. After a short search he found a bedroom and a sitting-room, well furnished, and commanding extensive views. They were in one of a row of substantial houses which by some freak of fortune had fallen from the high estate of fashionable residences to the lower level of respectable lodging-houses. The landlady's quotation, which, after the manner of such quotations, had attached to it a string of extras like the tail to a kite, having been accepted, Mr. Hervey requested that some dinner might be prepared for him. This of course meant chops—an extemporised lodging-house dinner invariably means chops. Having particularly requested that his chops should be broiled, not fried, Mr. Hervey, whilst the cooking was going on, went out, found a wine merchant's, and ordered half a dozen of whisky to be at once sent in. The sight of the bottles, the number of which augured well for a long stay, gladdened the landlady's heart. By the aid of the whisky, a kettle of hot water, sugar, and cigars, the new lodger spent a comfortable, if not an intellectual or improving, evening.

In the morning he sallied forth. Like every visitor to the old city who has time to spare, he seemed bent upon

seeing the natural beauties of the suburbs of Blacktown. His landlady, who thought him a nice, pleasant, free-spoken gentleman, gave him an oral list of the stock sights in the vicinity; but as soon as he was out of doors Mr. Hervey inquired the way to Oakbury, and learnt that an easy walk of about two miles would take him to that highly-favoured spot. The weather, although fine, was cold, so he decided to walk to his destination. He soon left the rows of houses and shops behind him; struck along a broad white road which cut its way through a level green sward, and in about three-quarters of an hour found himself in front of the Red Lion Inn, Oakbury.

He entered the inn—men of his stamp when in the country make entering inns a point of honour. He called for hot brandy and water, and was supplied with a jorum of that deep brown liquor, dear to rustic palates on account of its presumed strength. Hervey sipped it, lit a cigar, and entered into a cheerful conversation with the Red Lion and Lioness who were pursuing their calling in what, after the fashion of country inns, was a combination of bar and parlour. The Red Lion, an affable, condescending animal, and, like all noble animals, willing to relinquish toil for more congenial pursuits, seeing that his visitor was ready to talk, sat down in a round-backed chair near the fire, and left the Lioness to attend to the bottle and jug department, which, as the hour was just past noon, was in full swing of activity.

Hervey asked a variety of questions about the neighbourhood. He might really have been a gentleman of fortune anxious to buy a place and so properly particular as to what society might be round about. He obtained much valuable and interesting information about the "families of position," as they appeared to the eyes of the Red Lion. He learnt who lived in the big white house at the edge of the common, who in the house at the top of the hill, who in the house at the bottom. He was gradually leading up to the questions he wanted to ask, when the sound of carriage wheels was heard, and the Lion, after glancing over the wire window-blind, laid down his pipe and went

to the door. Hervey also glanced out of window, and saw two tall gentlemen who occupied the box-seats of a large waggonette. They were talking gravely and sadly to the Lion, who, whilst he listened with due respect, looked somewhat crestfallen and ill at ease.

"What's the matter now, Joe?" asked the Lioness rather anxiously, as her spouse returned.

"Say the last cask o' beer ran out two days before its time, so couldn't have been full. They look after trifles, they do."

"Oh, nonsense!" said the Lioness, tossing her head. "Some one must have got at it. Their servants are no better than others."

"Who are they?" asked Hervey.

"The Mr. Talberts of Hazlewood House," replied the landlady, with that smile on her face which seemed to come involuntarily on the faces of many people when they mentioned or heard the name of our gentle Horace and Herbert.

Hervey went hastily to the window and looked after the waggonette, which, however, was by now out of sight.

"Rich men, I suppose?" he said, reseating himself.

"They're rich enough; but oh, that particular!" said the Lioness, with another toss of her head. The accusation of short measure rankled in her breast.

"Close-fisted?" asked Hervey.

"Well, yes, they're close," said the Lion. "That is, they like to get a shilling's worth for a shilling."

"We all like that. Let me have it now. Two brandies—one for you and one for me."

The Lion laughed and filled the glasses. Hervey adroitly plied him with questions about the Talberts, and soon learnt almost as much as we know. He laughed with the landlord at their amiable peculiarities. It was well our friends did not hear the Red Lion, or Hazlewood House might have gone elsewhere for its beer.

"They are funny gents," said the Lion. "You'd never believe; but a day or two ago I was walking along the road. It was drizzling with rain. The Mr. Talberts they passed me, driving. All of a sudden they pull up at the hedge

round their paddock. Mr. Herbert he jumps down; he takes the whip and with the handle begins poking furiously in the hedge. I ran up thinking something was the matter. Law no! not it. He was a-poking at a bit of white paper which had blown in there. Poke and poke he did till he got it out—and Mr. Horace the while holding the horses and sitting and looking on as if it meant life or death getting out that paper. Rum thing to be so particular, ain't it?"

Hervey professed himself much amused and continued his questions. He heard all about Miss Clauson, the niece who had been staying at Oakbury for so long. He even learnt the name of every member of the Hazlewood House establishment, from that of the oldest retainer, Whittaker, to that of the latest arrival, Mrs. Miller the nurse. He heard, of course, the whole history, with additions, of the mysteriously-sent boy. And when he was told this, in spite of his self-control, a look of utter amazement spread over his face. He rose, and bade the Red Lion good day. The story he had heard must have engrossed his mind to an unprecedented extent, for he actually forgot to finish his brandy and water; a flattering tribute to the landlord's power of interesting a listener.

After leaving the inn Hervey took the first turning out of the main road. It was a little by-way leading to nowhere in particular. Here, as no onlookers were about, he gave vent to delight by sundry actions common to most men as soon as they find themselves alone after having received the best possible news. He smacked his thigh; he rubbed his hands together; he seemed to hug himself in his joy. He laughed aloud, but there was a cruel ring in his laugh, and there was a cruel look on his laughing mouth. His eyes brightened with the blended lights of malice and anticipated triumph.

"What luck!" he ejaculated. "What luck! I see it all from the very beginning. Confound it! it was a clever stroke. By G—— I've got her now! I've got her now!"

He calmed himself; returned to the main road and inquired the way to Hazlewood House. He stood for some

time in front of the entrance gates ; but finding that only the chimneys of the house could be seen from this point, he walked round until he could get a better idea of the building. "It all means money! Pots of money!" he said with glee. After this he returned to the gates and it seemed as if he meant to favour our friends with a call. However, if so, he changed his mind.

"No," he said, turning away. "There's a new element in the case which must be considered. No need to be in a hurry. I'll go back home and think it all out over a pipe."

So he faced about, and, in a thoughtful way, sauntered down the lane, or road, whose mission in this world is to give access to Hazlewood House and two or three other equally desirable residences.

It was a glorious winter's day. The sun was shining brightly ; so brightly that on the bare twigs of the hedges the hoar frost of the night had resolved itself into crystal drops which shone like jewels, and then, as if alarmed at their Protean nature, trembled and fell. Although a silvery haze hung round the horizon there was no fog. The air was sharp and crisp but not damp. The wind if cold was quiet. It was a day of a thousand—a day, in fact, on which, if she knows her business, a woman who has charge of a child takes it out for a good long walk.

Mrs. Miller knew her business, so it was quite in order that as Maurice Hervey was walking down the lane the nurse and the boy, on their way home to early dinner, should be walking up. Hervey, whilst deep in his meditations, heard a voice, and looking up saw the dark-clad woman and the golden-haired child within a few paces of him. He stopped short and looked at them.

Hervey to-day presented an appearance so different from that of the caged creature seen by Mrs. Miller at Portland that she would probably have passed him without recognition. He was now fashionably dressed and, had it suited his purpose, might have brushed elbows with the woman and yet left her ignorant of his release. This not being his purpose, he stopped short and waited. Naturally she raised her eyes and at once knew the truth.

Had Sarah Miller followed the impulse which seized her when she saw that face full of mocking triumph she would have uttered a cry of anguish. Only the fear of alarming the child prevented her from so doing. As it was, she gave a quick gasp and for a moment gazed at the man as if she saw a ghost. Then she stooped and said to the boy, "Run on, my pretty, run as fast as you can." The boy obeyed. Hervey made no effort to stop him, but he turned and followed him with his eyes. Then once more he faced Mrs. Miller.

She had by now recovered from the first shock, and looked at him not so much with fear as with hatred and defiance. She took a few steps past him, and placed herself as if to bar the way to Hazlewood House.

"What are you doing here?" she asked fiercely.

"My dear Sarah," said the man in mocking tones, "what a strange question to ask! Considering your anxiety to appoint the earliest day possible for our meeting, is it any wonder that I come at once to find you?"

"Now you've found me, what do you want?"

"My poor Sarah, can't you guess? When you paid me that friendly visit last summer I told you what I pined for. I have come to you in order to find some one else."

"She is hundreds of miles from here. You'll never see her again."

Even as she told the lie her heart sank. The gleam in Hervey's eyes showed her she had lied in vain. He laughed like one enjoying the situation. "Never see her again!" he echoed. "I am inconsolable. But chance meetings do sometimes occur. You don't mean to give or sell me any information, I suppose?"

"I'd cut my tongue out first."

"Oh, true and faithful servant! Then it's no good asking. But about yourself, Sarah—have you got a good place in the neighbourhood?"

"That's none of your business," said Mrs. Miller sharply. Hervey laughed again.

"I should like to hear you had a nice comfortable place. Something easy and suited to your declining years. You

have not worn well, my poor Sarah. You look at least twenty years older than when I first knew you."

She took no notice of the taunt. Again the man laughed his mocking laugh. "What kind of a place is yours, Sarah? As you know, I am much interested in you. You are a nurse, I suppose." He nodded in the direction of the boy, who stood some little distance off wondering in his childish way what his guardian was about with this gentleman.

"Yes, I am a nurse," said Mrs. Miller sullenly.

"And that is one of your charges? The youngest perhaps? A fine little fellow. Do you know I have often dreamed of owning such a boy as that. At heart I believe I have the germs of respectability and domestic goodness. What do you think, Sarah?"

"Your heart is as black as a coal," burst out the woman excitedly. "Would to God you had died in prison! For years it has been my daily prayer."

"Yet it availed nothing—the prayer of the righteous! Something gone wrong above, Sarah. Never mind, I give you good wishes in return for evil ones. I know something of this neighbourhood and the people, and if I could choose a place for you it would be one with two middle-aged gentlemen named Talbert, who live at Hazlewood House with a beautiful unmarried niece named Beatrice Clauson. That would be such a comfortable place for you, Sarah!"

Until now he had been playing with her as a cat plays with a mouse. There was nothing to show her the extent of his knowledge. For all she knew he might simply have come down here to find her. So she had guarded every word, every look, fearing lest she might give him information. Now he bared his claws and showed her that escape was impossible. She groaned but struggled no more.

"You will take money?" she asked.

"Oh yes, Sarah, I'll take money."

"And go away and trouble no more. Tell me where to find you to-morrow. I will come and arrange everything."

"Oh no, you wont. I never deal with agents. Your intervention is not needed, Sarah."

She stamped her foot angrily. "Tell me what you want," she exclaimed, "or leave me and go and do your worst. You may have men to deal with now, not women."

He threw off in a second every trace of mockery. He seized her wrist and held her. His eyes shone fiercely into hers. "Listen, you hag—you cat!" he said. "All your part in this business is to take a message. Go straight to her. Tell her I am here; free, and with a pocketful of money. Tell her to come to me to-morrow at my rooms. Tell her I will wait until twelve o'clock. If she is not there when the clock strikes, I swear I will come and see her in her own home—Do you understand? Answer me."

"Yes, I understand."

• "Here's the address." He scribbled it on a bit of paper. "Now you can go back and resume your neglected duties. A sweet little boy that, Sarah."

Without another word she left him. She took the boy by the hand and went through the gates of Hazlewood House. Hervey watched her disappear, chuckled maliciously, and strode off in the direction of Blacktown.

In a mechanical way Mrs. Miller gave the boy his dinner. She ate nothing herself, but her lips moved as if framing words, and her heart offered up its fervent, but incoherent and illogical prayers. Knowing that it was Beatrice's custom to visit the nursery soon after lunch and assure herself that her boy had dined well, Mrs. Miller did not go in search of her. She listened for the expected step, and when she heard it opened the door, and motioned her mistress to enter the adjoining room, the night nursery. She followed, and the look on her face told Beatrice what had happened.

"It has come?" she whispered and turning very pale.

Mrs. Miller threw herself on her knees, and, taking Beatrice's hand, sobbed aloud.

"Oh my poor dear! My poor dear!" she wailed. "It has come. Yes, it has come. The Lord has not thought fit to answer my prayers. Oh my dear mistress, may He stretch forth His arm and lighten the sorrow which is before you!"

She kissed Beatrice's hand. She fawned upon her almost like a dog. Her mistress seemed scarcely to hear her words—scarcely to notice her actions.

"It was bound to come," she said dreamily. "I have been waiting for it for weeks. The sword was over my head. I knew it must fall. Where is he?" she added.

"He was here, close at hand," said Sarah. Then noticing Beatrice's shudder: "He has gone away for a while: but I saw him. He gave me a message. Oh my dear, my dear! You must expect no mercy."

"I expect none. I will ask for none. Give me the message."

Mrs. Miller gave it word for word and then handed her the paper with the address: "I must go," said Beatrice. "There is no help for it. The shame which I dared not face—the crash I shrank like a coward from preparing for—has come. Well, if all must be known it will rid my life of the deceit which for years has made it a burden."

She turned away, entered the nursery and kissed the boy. Suddenly she gave the nurse a frightened look. "You saw him," she said; "did he see the boy?"

Mrs. Miller nodded sadly.

"Did he know—did he guess?"

"He said nothing. But oh, my poor dear! there was something in his manner that made me tremble—something that told me he guessed all."

"Then Heaven help me!" said Beatrice, leaving the room.

She went to her bedroom in which she stayed for hours. Hours during which she lived again in thought the whole of her life during the past five years. Years which had turned her from a light-hearted, impulsive girl into a grave and saddened woman. A woman who partly by her own folly, partly by the crime and cruelty of another, found herself to-day in as sore a plight as ever woman knew.

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT SHE LOOKED BACK UPON.

As the story of Beatrice's past is made up of things she knew, things she guessed, and things of which she knew nothing, it will be better to learn it in its veracious entirety than to glean it from the saddened musings that winter's afternoon.

After the battle-royal between Lady Clauson and her stepdaughter, and when Sir Maingay weakly and for the sake of peace left his daughter at home, whilst he fled to the Continent with that newly-acquired treasure, his beautiful wife, Beatrice settled down to the dullest of dull lives, or what certainly promised to be so unless the girl could brighten it by drawing on her own resources for amusement. On one point, however, she had nothing to complain of. A childless widow with a large income could not have enjoyed more freedom of action. Mrs. Erskine, the aunt, in whose care she was nominally placed, was old, wrapped up in her own varied ailments, and so selfish as to keep herself clear of suspecting people, because suspicion brought trouble and worry. Beatrice was free to spend her hours as it best suited her; to come and go as she chose, and generally to do what pleased herself. By this arrangement Mrs. Erskine saved herself much trouble and responsibility—things which are extremely injurious to an old gentlewoman in feeble health.

But Beatrice, who was in magnificent health, as all young girls of eighteen should be, soon found that to render life at Mrs. Erskine's worth living, she must find occupation for her lonely hours. Perhaps there were times

when the ideal pleasure and joy with which an untravelled mind invests a foreign tour, made her repent of her hastiness in disdaining to occupy a secondary place in her father's heart. But if it was so, her pride forbade any proposals of surrender. Nevertheless, something had to be done to make life tolerable. She cared little or nothing for general society, and even had she done so, the fact of her possessing few friends anywhere, and none in London, would have rendered her going out into the world a matter of difficulty.

So that Miss Clauson, who was a young lady of no mean abilities, and who had somehow imbibed the modern notion that if rightly directed a woman's brain-power is equal to a man's in acquiring knowledge, decided that the most satisfactory method by which time could be killed was by continuing her studies from the point at which she laid them down when she left the fashionable finishing school.

Being also rather troubled by the feeling that she ought to do something for suffering humanity, she organised a little charitable scheme. She had plenty of pocket-money. Sir Maingay, who since old Talbert's death had received a considerable sum per annum, paid out of the trust, for his daughter's maintenance and education, behaved most generously in this respect. There is no salve to the conscience so efficacious as a money-sacrifice!

Beatrice, then, did what good she could on her own account. As a piteous tale always opened her purse, revilers of indiscriminate almsgiving may think little of her efforts. Perhaps they bore no fruit save in one noteworthy instance.

Charity brought her in contact with a woman who, from a variety of circumstances, had been reduced from the state of a superior domestic servant to abject poverty, and who was lying almost at death's door. Beatrice heard her history, relieved her wants, had her doctored and cured, and by these acts made the woman her slave for life. She riveted the links for ever, when, fancying she could do with a maid, she, in spite of a grumble from her great-aunt, took

this woman, named Sarah Miller, into her service. This happened in the early days of her sojourn at Mrs. Erskine's.

The course of study progressed. For the most part Beatrice taught herself. After a while it struck her she should like again to take up her drawing. Here, as her ambition rose higher than wishing to execute the usual schoolgirl masterpieces, she needed a master. A caller, an acquaintance of Mrs. Erskine's, gave her a name and address which had been given to her by some one else. Beatrice wrote and asked the artist's terms. He replied. She wrote again, accepting the terms and begging him to call on a certain day. So Maurice Hervey came into her life.

• When first she saw him the girl was surprised to find she had summoned to her aid a young man of about twenty-five. But the age of a drawing-master appeared to Miss Clauson as a matter of secondary importance. So long as he knew his business what mattered if he was twenty-five or fifty-five.

Mrs. Erskine troubled nothing about the affair. She knew that a master gave her niece lessons twice or thrice a week. The old lady never even acquired his name. To her he was the drawing-master, no more and no less. There are many such old ladies as this!

In order that what happened may be read aright, two facts must be distinctly borne in mind. The first, that Beatrice Clauson was not then the stately and apparently emotionless young lady, whose calm and self-contained demeanour was such a subject of congratulation to her uncles, and such a puzzle to Frank Carruthers. She was but a girl of eighteen, proud if you will, but romantic, impulsive, and notwithstanding the shattering of the paternal idol, trustful of man and womankind. She was lonely; craved for sympathy; and in spite of her position in the world, her life, so far as she could see it, looked void and colourless. A long stretch without a visible goal. Lastly, she believed, as most young people of eighteen believe, that her judgment as to what was best for herself was infallible.

The second fact to be borne in mind is that Maurice Hervey at twenty-five was not, in appearance, the scowling, crafty-looking felon seen by Mrs. Miller in Portland prison, not even the malicious, mocking ruffian who confronted her on his release. The mask worn by the man when Beatrice first knew him fitted to perfection, and until the wearer chose showed no glimpse of the villainous, sordid nature it hid. He was decidedly good-looking, he was well-dressed, and if he carried a touch of the Bohemian about him, it was not more than was pleasant and compatible with the profession he followed. His hands, a matter upon which young girls set undue store, were white and well-formed. He was attentive and respectful in the discharge of his duties—doubly so after the first few lessons!

For by that time he had found out much about his pupil—not all he wanted to know, but a good deal. He had learnt that she was a baronet's daughter, and an heiress. He could not ascertain how much money she would come into or from whom it came. But, so far as it went, he believed his information to be trustworthy, and acted accordingly.

He began by awakening the girl's sympathy for his unworthy self. He told her, or, it might be said, conveyed to her prodigious lies about his own hard lot; he dilated on the drudgery of lesson-giving to a man who believed he had genius. So cleverly did he talk that Beatrice was persuaded that she was under an obligation to him for the very act of teaching. His lies were masterpieces, because he did not, like many self-styled neglected geniuses, believe in his own talents. The man knew that such skill as he possessed could make him, at the outside, a fifth-rate artist, or it might possibly be, a first-rate drawing-master.

But all the same he made Beatrice believe he was one day destined to storm the Royal Academy, and when once she believed this all differences in station between them vanished. Our age, as every one knows, is the triumph of art. Poor artists and struggling literary men do not now fawn upon lords—lords ask them to dinner and make much of them, or such is the common belief. So, now that Miss

Clauson was convinced that Maurice Hervey was a genius, no cold spectre of social distinction rose between the man and his desire.

The drawing lessons grew longer and more and more conversational. Hervey was an educated man, or at least knew how to turn such education as was his to the best account. The first sign of what was about to happen was Beatrice's beginning to wonder how she should be able to offer this man money for his services. Then followed other symptoms which are invariably distinctly pronounced when the sufferer is a self-willed girl of eighteen.

Hervey, as soon as he found himself on the same platform as his pupil, hurried matters on. He had pressing reasons, known only to himself, for bringing things to a conclusion. Perhaps his audacity helped him. At any rate, when one day he dashed the drawing materials aside and vowed he loved her, and unless she loved him he must fly and see her no more, the girl's answer was all he could have hoped for. To Beatrice, the fairy prince of her childish dreams had come.

She wished to write to her father at once. Strange to say, this did not suit her lover. With great modesty he represented that until he had made his name famous in art Sir Maingay might naturally object to the alliance. He was not, however, selfish enough to suggest a term of probation whilst the making-famous process was going on. On the contrary, he assured Beatrice that he could not live another month unless she were his wife. He redoubled these assurances when Beatrice told him indirectly that when of age she came into a large income. No, let them be married at once. Her father's consent could be won so much better after the ceremony. His, Maurice's, darling must be guided by him. Beatrice hesitated, Hervey pressed, and at last, like other darlings of eighteen, she consented to be guided by the man she loved.

He guided her to her first act of deceit. She informed Mrs. Erskine that she was going to Bournemouth for a fortnight to see an old school-friend. She comforted herself by thinking it was but an equivocation. She was going

to Bournemouth and a friend of hers lived or did live there —no doubt she would see her. Every one knows that equivocation is the inclined plane down which people slide to the pit.

With respect to her father she comforted herself by thinking that, as he married to please himself, she had a right to do the same. A kind of reasoning by analogy not uncommon to young people. Besides, he would know Maurice very soon, and, of course, learn to love him.

So to Bournemouth she went; but before going was quietly married to Maurice Hervey, and the fortnight spent at Bournemouth was their honeymoon. The rays of the honeymoon go sometimes far towards dispersing the glamour with which a bride surrounds her bridegroom. Some curious things happened to Beatrice.

In the first place her husband even now objected to Sir Maingay's being told of his daughter's happiness, and Beatrice, not wishing to cross him in these early days, consented as before for a limited period to be guided by his superior knowledge of the world.

In the second place the postman one morning brought a large letter for Hervey. Beatrice watched him rather curiously as he opened it, and she saw it contained a document, the endorsement of which informed all who could read that it was a copy of the last will and testament of William Talbert, Esq. Hervey explained that he merely took an interest in his darling's affairs, and thinking he ought to know something about them had written for the copy. This explanation sufficed, and Beatrice laughingly suggested that she should sit beside him and read the will with him. This was agreed to.

Hervey with a smile of satisfaction read how one third of the residuary estate was bequeathed to Beatrice, or rather to Horace and Herbert in trust for Beatrice. This was followed later on by another clause which in the event of Beatrice's making, before she was of the age of twenty-one, an unsuitable match, or even what appeared to her trustees an unsuitable match, Horace and Herbert were given what amounted to an unlimited power of dealing

with her share, a power which fell little short of appropriation. Old Talbert had determined that until his granddaughter arrived at years of discretion, her uncles should be able to defy fortune-hunters.

This clause, which was so clearly worded that even she could understand it, made Beatrice glance at her husband. His face was pale, his hands were shaking, and all of a sudden a string of fierce oaths dropped from his lips. A sharp pain ran through the girl's heart. Without a word, she rose and left him.

He soon followed her, apologised and believed he had pacified her, but his conduct had planted in her heart the doubt—the most painful doubt which a young wife can feel—that her husband had married her for her money, not for herself.

The next day Hervey went to town, on important business, he said. Beatrice naturally resented the desertion, but not having been long enough married to know what a fraud that plea of business often is, made no complaint. Nevertheless, something told her that her husband's business was in some way connected with the will. So the doubt became all but certainty.

Curiously enough, or naturally enough, Beatrice had no longer the wish to apprise her father of what had happened. Dimly she began to see the meaning of the step she had taken.

It was settled she should return to Mrs. Erskine's, and, as a slight misunderstanding is not sufficient to terminate the relationship between a husband and wife of a fortnight's standing, it was also arranged that Hervey should take lodgings in the neighbourhood, to which lodgings his wife could come as a pupil to a drawing-master. The fellow had by now resumed his mask, and seemed to be trying to efface the recollection of the will scene.

But the mask had been dropped once, and Beatrice, except in her conduct, was no fool. She went back to her home with a pain in her heart, and feeling years older than when she had left a fortnight ago. Mrs. Erskine manifested no interest in the visit to Bournemouth. She merely hoped that Beatrice had spent a pleasant time.

The girl felt very miserable ; a kind of dread which she vainly strove to thrust away, hung over her. She needed sympathy, needed a confidant. Such a secret as hers was too great for one breast. So she told her maid Sarah what had happened. The woman's slave-like worship and dog-like fidelity assured her silence.

Mrs. Miller, who, in spite of her religious peculiarities, knew the world, and knew also what such a marriage as this meant, suppressed the grief she felt. But to endeavour to ease her mind she made such inquiries as she could respecting Mr. Maurice Hervey. She even watched him, waited for him, tracked him in his goings out and comings in. She told Beatrice nothing of this self-instituted inquiry. To do the woman justice, had she found Hervey up to the standard of her requirements for Beatrice, she would have offered up thanks to Heaven more fervently than she had ever done in her life.

One day when Beatrice was paying a visit to her husband, he turned to her suddenly. "I must have money," he said, "there's no good beating about the bush."

"Have you no money?" asked Beatrice.

"I have twenty pounds, the remnant of a large sum I borrowed."

Beatrice had expected an appeal of this sort. Although Hervey had again and again told her that by the drudgery of teaching he could make a good income, so that, in marrying, money was a secondary consideration, this had been part of the dread hanging over her. An appeal of this sort would give her fears a stronger foundation. She said nothing, but taking out her purse, shook its contents on the table. The man laughed scornfully.

"It is no dribblet like that I want. I must have a thousand pounds by this day fortnight."

"Why tell me so? I cannot get it." She could not help the growing coldness of her voice.

"Yes you can, if you will. Will you do so?"

She looked at him steadily. "You are my husband," she said. "If I can, I will."

"I knew it," he said, with a nervous laugh. "All you

will have to do is to sign an undertaking promising to repay the money and interest out of your income within a certain number of years. You will do this?"

"Yes, I will do this. You are my husband."

"It is also necessary," he went on, with a covert glance at her, "to make a declaration—a mere matter of form. You must declare yourself to be twenty-one years of age."

The truth is that Mr. Hervey had been to the money-lenders, and without mentioning names, had endeavoured to negotiate a loan upon such security as Beatrice's fortune offered. Some of the usurers laughed in his face, but he soon found one whose business it was never to refuse to lend money on a forged bill or a false declaration provided the friends of the forger or the perjurer were of the stamp who would pay money to avoid criminal proceedings.

"I do not quite understand," said Beatrice. She would not understand.

"It's a mere matter of form, my dear girl, it can do no one harm. It is only to swear you are twenty-one. I'm sure no one would doubt it."

Beatrice covered her face with her hands, and the tears trickled through her fingers. Hervey attempted to caress her. Sadly but firmly she pushed his arm away.

"I cannot do it," she said.

His brow grew black. "Damn it! you must," he said roughly.

She rose. "I will not," she said in accents which told him she meant what she said. "I will do this much: I have some jewellery; it shall be placed in your hands. The only favour I ask is that money may be raised on it in such a way that some day I can get it back. Part of it was my mother's."

Hervey knew that all her jewellery would not help him. So he pressed her to make the false declaration. First he commanded, secondly he reasoned, thirdly he besought in an abject way. And with his grovelling entreaties for money, every atom of love for him went out of the girl's heart. Love may survive ill-usage, faithlessness, and

wickedness—meanness kills it. She turned and left him before he could stop her.

She did as she had promised. That evening Mrs. Miller brought him the packet of jewellery. There were some valuable articles in it, as Sir Maingay, who had great faith in his daughter's discretion, and who perhaps had feared that if not given at once, they would never be given, had entrusted her with some diamonds which had belonged to her late mother. So it was that Hervey was able to raise some two hundred pounds on the trinkets. To his credit be it said that he sent certain mysterious tickets to Beatrice which, upon inquiry, she found would enable her to redeem the things of which she had deprived herself.

Three days after this Sarah made a discovery, or rather completed her inquiry into Hervey's real nature. By pertinacity in tracking and watching; by questions asked in certain houses in a neighbourhood to which she had followed him, she found the man had been for some space of time, and was even now, pursuing a low intrigue with a girl. With flashing eyes Mrs. Miller went to Beatrice and told her this.

Beatrice heard her in silence. Then she spoke coldly and gravely. Events were fast making a woman of her. ~~~“Sarah,” she said, “I will see Mr. Hervey, and if needful you will see him. Bear in mind that if your charges against him are false, you leave me at once.”

She took Sarah with her, told her to wait in the street, and then entered her husband's room. She told him coldly and without apparent emotion what she had learnt. She gave the name of a street, and the number of a house.

Hervey of course denied it. Beatrice then said she would fetch his libeller, who should be properly dealt with. Hervey wavered, stammered, and then once for all dropped the mask. He brutally told his young wife to let him manage his own affairs of that sort in his own way. So Beatrice knew that Sarah had spoken the truth. And with this knowledge the love for this man which had already been driven out was replaced by a feeling of absolute hate and contempt.

Once more and only once she saw him. A few days later he wrote, bade her come to him, and threatened in case of refusal to come to her. She went. She scorned him too much to fear him.

He renewed his request that she would sign the false declaration of age.

"I will not," she said.

"Will you telegraph to your father, and say you must have a thousand pounds—tell him it means life or death."

"I will not: nor would he send it if I did." Hervey, who by now was getting to know something of his wife's character, felt that nothing would make her bend to his will. With an oath he raised his hand and struck her. His true brutal nature leapt forth. He covered her with reproaches; he reviled her; he told her he had never cared for her; told her he had but married her to stave off ruin, thinking the small sum he needed would be easily raised upon her prospects. He vowed to be revenged for her obstinacy. He would make her life a hell. He would drag her name through the dirt. She should rue until her death the day on which she refused to do his bidding.

When Beatrice got away from this storm of words, she walked back home with a buzzing in her head. Once inside the door she fainted.

Three days afterwards she read that Maurice Hervey had been brought before the magistrates on a charge of forgery, and committed for trial. She found means to send him a message, asking if he had money to pay for his defence. He sent back word that he should plead guilty. He really did so, and as the forgery was a crafty, premeditated, cruel affair, the judge very properly sent him to penal servitude for five years. His wife as she read the sentence gave a groan of relief.

Now the weakest part of her nature—a part no doubt inherited from Sir Maingay—showed itself. She let things drift. To a girl just past eighteen five years seems as inexhaustible as five hundred sovereigns would seem to a schoolboy. The remembrance of her secret marriage haunted her like the remnants of a ghastly dream. Five

years. Five long years! Surely something must happen before they were spent. Something did happen!

What were her feelings when the truth first came home to her? When she knew she could cheat herself no longer? When no imaginary ailment would account for her condition? When, in plain words, the fact that she was to bear the burden common to womanhood was forced upon her? Then Beatrice prayed that she might die!

Even then she would not go to her friends and tell them all. Still those long uncertain years stretched out before her. If she could only conceal this new trouble as she had concealed her marriage, there was peace—peace for years. Sarah was told what she already guessed, and upon hearing her mistress's wishes simply set about executing them.

The child was born, and none save the mother and her maid knew the truth. Hard as was the task, it was no harder to Beatrice than to others who, without the aid and faithful service at her command, have concealed what if revealed meant ruin. The elder woman arranged all. She left her mistress as a servant leaves; she prepared a place, and when the time came Beatrice found her grief lightened by all a loving woman can do for another in such a plight. Of course there was deceit—deceit seemed to have forced itself into the girl's life! There was a long visit to pay somewhere, a visit from which Beatrice returned a shadow of her former self. But none knew, none even guessed the cause.

Until the child was born Beatrice's prayer was that both she and it might die. Can a sadder, more pitiful prayer be framed by a woman? The truth could then be told to all. The early death would be the full expiation of her folly. The few who loved her would forgive and pity her. But her prayer was unanswered—death never even threatened mother or babe.

The child was born; the tiny head nestled on the mother's breast, and a strange new feeling awoke within her—the overpowering instinct of maternal love. Her thoughts, which had once been, in case the child lived, to hate it for the father's sake, turned to pure, sweet affection

for the innocent, helpless little being. So far from wishing it dead, she would not now have wished it unborn. When she returned to her home she left it with many tears in Sarah's charge.

For years she saw it by stealth, saw it grow more and more the picture of perfect childhood; loved it and worshipped it more each time she saw it, and at last, when she returned to her father's house, and felt that her visits to her treasure would now perforce be less and less frequent, a wild craving to have it with her always, to see it every day, every hour, awoke in her passionate heart.

Then came the second quarrel, and the new home. And even as she settled to go down to her uncles' the nucleus of the daring scheme for regaining her boy framed itself in her brain, and was eventually shaped into form and acted upon with perfect success.

But the five years were passing, passing. At the end of them stood what Beatrice shrank from picturing, a convict who would come and claim his wife. Beatrice had, indeed, expected that when first arrested he would find some way of proclaiming his marriage, if only in fulfilment of his threat of dragging her name into the dirt.

Yet he made no sign. He was crafty and calculating. The term of the sentence was not to him an eternity. When it ended he knew that by keeping the secret he should be in a more advantageous position to turn matters to his own benefit. Beatrice would be well past twenty-one, and in command of a large income. He meant to be thoroughly revenged for the obstinacy she had displayed in refusing to perjure herself, and so find him means to buy up the forged bills, but he meant to have money also.

This is the story of the life of the last five years upon which Beatrice looked back that afternoon. These are the pictures of the man and the woman—the husband and wife—who were to meet on the morrow like foes in a deadly duel.

And over and above all this, there was another matter ever present in the girl's mind—another name which came to her lips, not in accents of hate, but love. She had

attempted to deceive him, but not herself. In fact, it seemed part of her punishment—the hardest part of all—that she loved Frank Carruthers. She had sobbed out the secret on the faithful Sarah's breast. She had wept through the weary hours of many a night as she thought of the utter hopelessness of love between them. His coming to Oakbury had doubled her grief. She had not only to lament "what has been," but to regret "what might have been."

Blame her if you must ! Forgive her if you can ! At least pity her !

CHAPTER XXI.

MAKING PROUD KNEES BEND.

PROVIDED he is not a French journalist whose drooping honour is cured by a scratch, a man about to fight a duel has generally preparations to make. Maurice Hervey's approaching duel being of a peculiar nature, the preparations he made were also peculiar. They consisted of inducing the room he occupied, which, in an unmolested state, was a nice tidy apartment, to look as disreputable and dissipated as with the resources at his command it was possible. He gave no orders for his breakfast things to be cleared away, but added to the relics of the meal a bottle of whisky and a glass. He also laid a short pipe and a tobacco-pouch on the table. With great satisfaction he found in a drawer a dirty pack of cards : these were also placed in a position to carry effect. He told the servant not to attend to his bedroom, just yet ; so that by his leaving the door of communication between the two rooms open, a visitor might have the privilege of gazing on a dishevelled sleeping apartment. Given the materials at his disposal, he made a very fair effect with them.

He kept his own appearance in sympathy with the surroundings. He wore slippers which he trod down at the heel. His clothes were too new to look shabby, but by putting on a soiled shirt, discarding his waistcoat and cravat, he managed to get within reasonable distance of his requirements.

All these preparations were inspired by an exquisite refinement of malice. Metaphorically he meant to bring Beatrice down on her knees, and his cruelty told him that

to one of her type, the process would be doubly disagreeable when it took place in such a scene.

"Gad!" he said, as he gazed round and approved of his handiwork. "I wish I had my prison suit here. I'd don it once more for your benefit, my lady."

He gave orders that if a lady called she was to be shown upstairs at once, then he lit a cigar and lounged in the easy-chair. At five minutes to twelve, just as the man was wondering whether she would come or not, and if, in the event of her not coming, it would be well for his own interests to seek her at Hazlewood House, the door opened and Beatrice stood before him. He laughed a low mocking laugh, and without changing his lounging attitude, looked up at her.

She took it all in, the disreputable look of the place and of its tenant; he could see that by the quiver of her nostril, and the look of deepening scorn on her firm mouth. His eyes gleamed with triumph.

And she, as she looked at him, the thought ran through her, how could she ever in her most foolish girlhood's days have loved this man—have loved him even for an hour? His features were the features she had once thought so perfect—now no human creature on the earth could have inspired her with such loathing. She did not fear him, simply because she knew the worst he could do—the heaviest penalty she could be called upon to pay. Or she thought she knew.

"Well, my affectionate wife," he said, knocking the ash off his cigar, and looking her up and down; "you've grown into quite a fine piece of goods, quite a tip-topper, no end of a swell. You haven't pined much for me, I guess."

She shivered as she heard his voice and coarse, mocking compliments, but she kept her proud eyes upon him. "You have something to say to me—say it." She spoke sternly.

"Say! I should think it was for you to say something. You who sent me to herd with felons for five years. You who would not stretch out a hand to save me. What have you to say?" He spoke with a vicious, bitter intonation.

She said nothing. She might have told him of misery which she had undergone—misery which she had to undergo—to which his well-merited punishment was as nothing.

"Nearly five years," he went on, "think of that—dull, dead drudgery. Week after week, month after month, year after year the same. All through you—through you! And now, my sweet wife, which do you expect me to do, to strike you or to kiss you?"

He changed his tone to that of raillery, a tone more loathsome to Beatrice than that which showed his real nature. He took a step towards her as he said the last words.

"You have done both to me," she said, slowly and bitterly. "The memory of the kiss is to-day more degrading to me than that of the blow." He scowled as her scorn stung him—scowled and took another step towards her.

There was a sharp-pointed knife lying on the table, Beatrice's fingers mechanically rested themselves on the handle. "If you touch me," she said quietly, "I think I shall kill you."

The man knew she meant it. He threw himself into a chair, and laughed scornfully.

"Come," he said, "let us go to business."

"Yes. Business is the only question between us now."

"Sit down. I can't talk to you while you stand up there. And I've lots to say."

To show how little she feared him she obeyed.

"Now," he said, "to come to the point; what proposal have you to make? I'm your husband, and with all your put-on pride and carelessness, you know I have the whip-hand at last."

Beatrice looked at him and again wondered how she could have ever loved this ruffian.

"I will do this," she said. "On certain conditions I will give you one-half of my income."

"And how much may your income be?"

"Two thousand five hundred a year, I am told."

"You lie," said Hervey coarsely. "It is more."

Beatrice flushed. She half rose from her seat, then returned to it without troubling to reply.

"Take it for argument's sake it is so," said the man. "Now for the conditions."

"That you never seek me, never trouble me, never make known to any one that I am your wife."

"You have kept the secret then?"

"One other person knows it, my faithful servant."

"That hag! Of course you hoped I should die in the five years."

"No," said Beatrice simply; "but I hoped I might."

The duel was progressing. The advantage as yet had been to Beatrice. Hervey's turn was to come.

"Listen," he said; "I have also a proposal to make and conditions." Beatrice bent her head.

"You have two thousand five hundred a year. The hundreds are quite enough for a woman to live on, the thousands shall be mine."

She was silent for a minute. "Yes," she said, "I will even do that—at least for many years."

Hervey laughed maliciously. "How nice to be so hated! I never made anything out of a woman's love, but her hate is profitable. Now hear the conditions."

"I have named them already," said Beatrice coldly.

"Hear mine, I say," said Hervey, bringing his hand down on the table, and speaking in grim earnest. "I will go away, never seek you, never trouble you so long as you pay the money; but before I go"—here he bent forward and spoke in a low, grating voice—"before I go you shall come to me here, in these rooms, and for a month shall live here as my wife. All your fine relations, all your dear friends, shall know you are the wife of Maurice Hervey, forger, felon, and, at present, ticket-of-leave man. After that I'll leave you and take the money."

Beatrice made no reply. She drew her mantle round her and rose. "Don't like my proposal," mocked Hervey. "I thought it out carefully though—thought it out night after night—for years and years I thought it out—how I

was to be paid in full for everything. I have you now—I have you now, my sweet wife.”

“I think you are mad,” said Beatrice contemptuously.

“Mad! No, I’m not mad. Are you going to leave me? After such a separation to leave me so soon!” She moved towards the door.

“Which means, I suppose, that you leave me to do my worst?”

“Yes. You must do your worst.”

“Which means, take whatever the law forces you to give me? You know the law will give me something.”

“I believe it will,” said Beatrice wearily.

“Yes, I’ll take what the law gives me. Are you versed in the law?” There was something in his voice, in his triumphant look, which for the first time made her fear.

“Do you know,” he went on, “that the law will give me the custody of a certain pretty, golden-haired boy? That a wife who absents herself from her husband and his home has no right to deprive him of his child. Here is the home I offer you. I long for you and my boy. I demand him. Give him to me. Ah, I have you now!”

He had. His thrust seemed to pierce her heart. She uttered a low cry and grasped the back of a chair for support. “It is not true,” she gasped.

“Go to your lawyer and find out,” he said. “I have consulted mine. The boy is my own. Ah, what pleasure I shall find in his company! How nice for him to be known hereafter as the forger’s son. Now will you accept my conditions? Now have I got your proud knees to bend? Now will you come to me and avow yourself the wife of an injured husband?”

He almost shrieked the sentences. He felt he had his full grasp of revenge.

“I must think. I must think,” she murmured.

“Yes, go and think. I’ve got to think too. I’ve got to find out whether any quibble can deprive you of the money. If so, you’ll have to marry me again and keep the first marriage dark. Hang me! that will be even better.”

“Let me go,” she said.

"Yes, you can go. But come to me again the day after to-morrow. Then I'll tell you what to do. Ah, my lady, you'd better have got the money I wanted years ago. I told you at the time you were a fool."

She did not hear his last words. She had left the room. Hervey threw himself into his chair and laughed long and loud.

"Revenge and money!" he said. "I'll bring her down to the very dust. I'll make her beg on her knees for the boy before I spare her even him. Luck! was there ever such luck?"

CHAPTER XXII.

HARRY LEARNS A NEW WORD.

I AM informed by those who ought to know that a credit balance at one's bankers possesses great virtues as an elevator of both morals and character. That, apart from any sordid consideration or miserly joy, it enables a man to face with greater courage the smaller ills and annoyances of life, renders him less liable to many temptations, teaches him to regard his fellow-creatures with more affectionate eyes, and generally to acquiesce in the wisdom of the arrangement which made the world as it is. If this be so, the universal desire to grow rich may have for its mainspring the noblest motives.

As in nine cases out of ten a woman holds money in far greater reverence and awe than a man ~~does, the possession~~ of such a balance should be to her doubly gratifying and elevating. With money woman is a power. It was the weak concession, begun years ago for man's selfish ends, completed to-day for the sake of justice, that a woman has any right to hold property at all, which has led up to the demand for womanhood suffrage.

Beatrice had a very large credit balance in the hands of the family bankers, Messrs. Furlong, Stephens, Furlong, Seymour, and Furlong, an establishment which for the sake of brevity, and on account of its antiquity, was commonly known as the Blacktown Old Bank. It was a very large balance, so large that it annoyed Horace and Herbert to think of its lying at the bankers. With their praiseworthy regularity the trustees had every half-year paid their niece's income to her account at Messrs. Furlong's, and as Beatrice

did not spend one-fifth of it, the money bred with its proverbial fecundity.

Until their niece came to stay with them the Talberts had, without even consulting her, invested all surplus income in good dividend—paying preference to debenture stocks, chosen because they only paid four per cent—no well-advised borrower should think of offering more than four per cent. Doing so creates mistrust. During the last year Beatrice had asked them to let the money lie at the bank. So at the bank it was, as Horace said, not bearing a fraction of interest. It vexed him to see such waste.

Only at Christmas he had remonstrated with her. "You are simply making our friends"—several members of the elongated firm lived in the neighbourhood—"a handsome yearly present. Paying one of their clerk's salaries, in fact."

"Perhaps that was why Mr. Stephens was so attentive to me at dinner last week," said Beatrice placidly.

"Oh, nonsense! It's a mere nothing to them. But why should they have your money for nothing and lend it out at seven or eight per cent?"

Beatrice could give no reason. She simply said she wished it to remain as it was for a while. Horace and Herbert began to wonder if she had afoot any scheme for endowing a hospital, or restoring the parish church.

However, the money lay idle and at call, and if Horace's explanation of the method by which bankers make fortunes was correct, the page in the red basil-covered ledger, headed "Beatrice Cläuson," must have been a gratifying sight for the Messrs. Furlong and the rest of the firm.

Now among other cashiers at the Blacktown Old Bank there was—perhaps there is now—one who shone forth pre-eminently, on account of his general smartness and spruceness. A young man who, more fortunate than many, had been thrown into the very position of life for which he was suited, perhaps made. Who counted gold, ever so many coins at a time, with the dazzling rapidity of a fly-wheel, and the assuring infallibility of a chronometer. Who detected a false note or a forged cheque as if by inspiration. Who "pointed" at the very touch of a bad half-sovereign

even as a dog points at game. A cashier worth his weight in bullion, and well worthy of promotion, which, let us hope, is by now his.

One morning—the very morning which Mr. Hervey had appointed for his second interview with Beatrice—a few minutes after the respectable liveried porter had drawn the bolts of the outer doors, and so proclaimed that the Bank was ready for all comers, a cheque for one thousand pounds, payable to “self” or “bearer” and signed “Beatrice Clauson” was handed across the broad mahogany counter to the spruce cashier. To him, not being in county society, Beatrice Clauson was but a name, and awoke no emotions. She might be young or old, beautiful or ugly, so long as her balance covered the amount of the cheque. But all the same, being a young man who could think, it struck him that it was very unusual for a lady to send a thousand-pound cheque to be simply cashed across the counter. So before uttering the usual compound word query “How’l-you-hav’-it?” our cashier gave the presenter of the cheque a comprehensive but inoffensive glance. All he learnt was that she was a tall woman of an uncertain age, and was dressed in black. There was nothing to tell him whether she was “self” or merely “bearer.”

He leaned across the counter and asked ~~her~~ ^{in the} politest manner if she was Miss Clauson.

“No, sir,” replied the woman. As she said no more, matters came to a deadlock. The cashier thought that the working of the machinery of banking needed readjustment on some minor points such as this. He hesitated. Twice the curious compound-query trembled on his lips, twice he drew it back. His inspiration that something was wrong with the cheque was not a very strong one, but, on the other hand, his reputation for shrewdness was so well-established that, for the sake of the fame and applause which might be gained, he could afford to risk a rag of it. Moreover, seeing “bearer” glance nervously at the clock decided him.

Asking her to wait one minute he left his post, and telling the clerk next him to keep his eye on the woman,

dived through the glazed door at the back of the Bank, through which such of the partners as chose could see that their money-making machine was going properly. He showed the cheque and told his tale.

An alarm like this is contagious. Make an indentation with your teeth on a sovereign—pass it, and if you could see that sovereign in two days' time you would see it bitten almost out of recognition. A coin must be above suspicion. Once libelled it is lost and doomed to the melting-pot.

The signature on the cheque was compared with Miss Clauson's standard signature, and of course now that alarm was raised did not seem quite right. The cashier's breast swelled. The partners were smiling approvingly.

The young man returned to his post. "It is a rule of the Bank," he said, "when cashing a large cheque like this for a stranger, to ask for a reference." As he spoke he fixed his eagle eye upon the woman.

She looked very nervous, glanced towards the door, and for a second or two did not answer. For that second or two the cashier was a proud young man. He saw the signs of guilt. He had saved the Bank a thousand pounds. He was going to punish the guilty. His own value in the eyes of the firm would spring to a higher premium. Happy cashier!

But the supposed culprit spoke. "I did not understand that," she said. "Perhaps you had better step out and speak to Miss Clauson."

This was a terrible shock; but there was yet hope. The Miss Clauson outside might be a confederate. As Beatrice had never been inside the Bank, the cashier could not be expected to identify her. He reported progress to his chiefs, and was vexed to see the approving smile fade from their faces.

Thereupon Mr. Stephens, a gray-haired old gentleman of fine banking presence; courteous; typical of the old school; Tory to the backbone, as all bankers ought to be, put on his hat and sauntered out of the Bank door. Sure enough in a four-wheeled cab sat Beatrice and her golden-haired boy. Mr. Stephens, with the deceit sanctioned by

commerce, if not by Christianity, seemed surprised and overjoyed to see Miss Clauson.

He complimented her on her good looks—old gentlemen of his type make a point of complimenting every young lady. He asked after his excellent friends and neighbours. He remarked that the days would soon begin to lengthen. He patted the little boy on his head, wished Miss Clauson good-day, and sauntered back into the Bank. He did not speak to the cashier, but no doubt a sign or a token passed between them, for without more ado the young man asked Mrs. Miller "How'l-you-hav'-it?"

For once in the annals of banking that simple phrase conveyed deep emotion. Much seemed to have slipped away from the speaker when he saw his chief's masonic sign.

Mrs. Miller would have five hundred in gold, and five Bank of England notes for one hundred pounds each. The money was counted out, but the operation lacked the cashier's usual spring and vivacity. Mrs. Miller buttoned the notes inside her dress. The bag of gold she placed in her pocket, where with every movement it bumped heavily but reassuringly against her leg, and in dumb but painful show proclaimed that it was safe. Then she rejoined her mistress, and the cab carried them to Blacktown railway-station.

They booked to Paddington. As they wanted no companions they entered a ladies' carriage. Every traveller knows that solitude is most often found in those compartments reserved exclusively for the fair sex. This is a delicate compliment to man, but not, perhaps, fully appreciated by such men who, after eyeing vacant seats enviously, have to enter a carriage more than three parts full of people.

The train started. For a while Beatrice sat as one in a reverie. Mrs. Miller, who held the boy, watched her face. Beatrice sighed, looked up, and met her companion's gaze.

"He will follow us," she said. She trembled as she spoke.

"Yes, if he can find us. Poor dear! if he can do so he'll hunt you to death. We'll go where he can't find us. There we'll wait until he can trouble you no more, my sweet."

"Ah, when will that be?" sighed Beatrice.

"When he is struck down. When my prayers are answered. When you look on his dead face, and know that you are free!"

"Hush! hush! How can you dare to pray for a man's death? Even I, whom he has so wronged, could not force my lips to form that prayer."

"Oh my dear! my dear! that is different. You would be praying for yourself. God would not listen; but I pray only for you, and He will."

"Sarah, be silent," said Beatrice. She had always set her face sternly against her maid's religious flights. But Mrs. Miller's excitement had by now reached a pitch which resisted even Beatrice's commands.

"See!" she said in thrilling tones, which made even the child open his eyes in wonderment, "last night a sign came to me, a dream. I looked down from somewhere, and saw myself as I must be, as it was fixed I should be before the world began, where the worm dieth not——"

"My poor Sarah, be calm."

"Where the fire is not quenched. I saw myself, and I saw him. He was close at hand. Oh, God means to strike, and soon, very soon."

"The fire" had such intensity, her eyes such a wild look in them, that little Harry, who had watched her in that spellbound manner common to reflective children, came to the conclusion that something was wrong, and set up a lusty roar.

"See," said Beatrice reproachfully, "you have frightened the boy."

The woman grew calm at once. The blaze of fanaticism faded from her face, and she was once more the attentive nurse and faithful servant. The train hurried them onwards on their flight.

Flight! Yes, it was flight! Hervey's threat had struck home. It had carried conviction. Beatrice never doubted his assertion that although it might be impossible for him to force her to come to his side, he could legally take the boy from her. She determined to fly, leave no trace, hide

for a while, and let the man in her absence do his worst. If he told her friends the tale of the marriage it would at least save her from the pain of so doing. She had not yet settled whither to go, but she meant to-night to be out of England.

The little boy, as was usual when he appeared in public, had attracted much attention whilst they waited on the Blacktown platform. So great is the interest excited by such a perfect specimen of childhood that every woman and not a few men turned and looked after him. At the first stoppage a lady who saw him through the window actually fetched her husband out of the refreshment room to look at his golden hair. She was but a young wife, or she might have known better. Pleasing *as such admiration must have been to Beatrice, it seemed to trouble Mrs. Miller. As the train resumed its course she turned to Beatrice. "It must be done, my dear. It must be done."

Beatrice, who now had the boy, hugged him tightly. "I won't—I can't do it," she said.

"We shall be traced all over the world by it, my dear," said Mrs. Miller sadly.

"Oh, Sarah! It is too cruel—too cruel! See, let us twist it up and hide it."

Therewith she twisted up Harry's sunny locks, ~~fastened~~ fastened them over on the top of his head, and fastened them with a hair-pin. His cap was replaced, and very comical the boy looked with his hair growing upwards.

And very pretty he looked when a minute afterwards, thinking this was a new sort of game, he shook off his cap, shook out the knot, and, presto! down fell the glowing cloud again.

It was tucked up again. It was shaken out again—and again and again. It was fine sport for the baby, but Beatrice began to glance timidly at her maid, who shook her head ominously. "We shall be followed everywhere," she said. Beatrice sighed.

"He'll be a big boy in no time, my pretty," said Sarah, "then it must come off. Don't run the risk now. There's not such hair in the three kingdoms."

Strange that, a woman who believed so implicitly in destiny, Mrs. Miller should be in her calm moments so calculating and foreseeing.

Beatrice kissed the soft cloud, and said that was why it was such a sin. Sarah, without a word, drew out a newspaper and a large pair of bright scissors. Beatrice turned away to hide her tears.

Sarah cut a hole in the centre of the newspaper—a hole just big enough for the boy to put his head through. He did so, and thought it great fun. His blue eyes danced with delight. "Hold the corners, miss," said Sarah. Beatrice with averted eyes took up two of them in her trembling hands. The cruel work began.

Ruthless as the shears of Atropos, Sarah plied her bright blades, and the boy's glittering locks fell in soft masses on the outspread *Standard*. Never before had the columns of that influential journal gleamed so brightly. Clip, clip, clip, went the scissors, every clip seeming to cut Beatrice's heart. In five minutes the work was roughly done, and the glory of Harry's hair gone for ever.

Beatrice positively sobbed. She gathered up every thread of gold, kissed and wept over the wreck, then put it away to be treasured up. She clasped her disfigured darling to her breast.

"Oh, my poor little boy!" she cried. "My little shorn lamb! Oh, it was cruel, too cruel! A cruel, wicked mother I am to you, my pet." She hugged the boy, and bewailed the loss of his curls—a loss which the late proprietor appeared to view with intense satisfaction. He was experiencing a new sensation, and at every age a new sensation is a matter of great interest.

Presently something seemed to stir Beatrice into great animation. "Mother!" she said, "Mother! Listen, my pet, say after me, mother."

He smiled his little smile, pursed up his lips, and made, for the first attempt, a very fair imitation of the word. The tears streamed down Beatrice's cheeks. She kissed the boy passionately. "Say it again—say it always," she cried, "mother, mother, mother."

The little autocrat, being in high good temper, consented to humour her, and all the way to London Beatrice taught her boy the new word, even made him dimly comprehend that it was in future to be the title of the person whom his lisping tongue had until now only given the name of Bee-Bee, or some such infantile rendering of the style by which he heard her addressed.

The comfort which his readiness to catch up the new word brought to Beatrice's heart almost compensated for the regret she felt at the ruthless deed which had been done by the scissors.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PAINFUL DUTIES.

AFTER the two great crimes of "removing the landmarks of the constitution to pander to the masses," and not wiping one's shoes—the one an imperial, the other a domestic sin, yet equally grave—unpunctuality at table was the most heinous offence in the eyes of Horace and Herbert. Without being exactly gourmands they liked their food cooked to a turn. Most bachelors who have turned forty exhibit the same liking. The Talberts took a great deal of trouble about their cuisine, and expected to be rewarded by finding everything, from the salt to the salmon, as it should be. Such a matter as a hard-hearted potato was all but unknown at their table, and would have formed the subject for a court of inquiry, and, if needed, a revision of kitchen utensils.

At their refined dinner-parties it was understood that after a certain time of grace no one was to be waited for. It was their theory that keeping several guests waiting for one laggard was a breach of politeness. There were unkind people who said that the brothers would break this rule for a lord. They wronged our friends. They would have waited for no one under the rank of a duke or at least a marquis.

So that when Whittaker having struck the resonant gong and so proclaimed that lunch was ready, ten minutes passed by without Beatrice's responding to its hospitable summons, it is no wonder that Horace and Herbert began to look grave. The soup was on the table; Whittaker was waiting his masters' commands. He, who from long

association felt the situation as much as they did, looked absolutely sympathetic. Although he had no reason to suppose her stone deaf he ventured to suggest that Miss Clauson had not heard the gong.

The beauty of the Talberts' character was that politeness invariably triumphed over principle. Punctuality was here the principle; it was outraged, yet forced for a while to submit. Horace forbade a repeated summons, and they actually waited another five minutes before they sent Whittaker to inquire for Miss Clauson. Whittaker reported that Miss Clauson, the nurse, and the little boy had gone out immediately after breakfast and had not yet returned.

"Then the nursery dinner will be spoiled too," said Horace sadly, as he seated himself and ladled out the soup. Horace with his kind heart felt for any one who was doomed to suffer from a spoiled dinner.

After a solemn lunch the brothers waited for a while in the dining-room. They expected every moment that Beatrice would appear. They did not of course mean to scold her, but were prepared to say a few words of mild remonstrance; to show her, in fact, how the bad example of unpunctuality must demoralise an establishment.

But as Beatrice did not appear, the well-meant little lecture they were tacitly preparing turned into open expressions of wonder as to why her morning ramble should be so protracted. Perhaps she had gone somewhere to lunch. Perhaps something had happened. Just as they had reached this last stage of supposition, Whittaker brought in a telegram. It was from Beatrice and sent from Oxford Circus. "We are in London"—it ran—"do not be uneasy; will write to-night."

They were greatly surprised, and marvelled on what errand could she have gone to London? No doubt it was all right. She had most likely gone to her father's. Perhaps Sir Maingay was ill. Beatrice might have intercepted a telegram and impulsively started off at once. But why take the child and the nurse? Why—— There, they were unable to make head or tail of the matter, so could only wait for the morning's post.

"Beatrice might have been more explicit," said Horace, looking at the telegram once more.

"Yes," said Herbert, "she had nine words to spare."

"Telegrams are one of the pests of modern life," continued Horace. "People dash off these ill-worded, unpunctuated phrases instead of a proper letter. No one can write a decent letter now."

Horace, who had the gift of writing peculiarly well-constructed and elegant, if rather too lengthy epistles, felt keenly on the tendency of the age to conduct its correspondence by means of short, snapping sentences after the manner of Mr. Mordle's style of talking.

"I hope she will be back soon," said Herbert. "Frank comes to us the day after to-morrow."

"He is in good health now, isn't he?"

"Splendid, I believe."

"Then I think we can give him the '58 this time—the '47 is growing low."

This was not meanness. It was but the caution a wise man exercises over his cellar. Besides, who could complain of the delicate graduation? 1858 is a fine wine; many prefer it to 1847.

Beatrice's promised letter came in the morning. Horace read it first. His face was a perfect blank. He read it again before he handed it to the anxious Herbert, who, although he saw from his brother's face that something strange had happened, was for once unable to make the slightest guesses at the truth. Here is Beatrice's letter:—

"MY VERY DEAR UNCLES—I should be ungrateful for the kindness you have shown me if I left you in any anxiety a moment longer than I could help. I sent you a telegram yesterday afternoon to show you that no evil had befallen me.

"I scarcely know what to say to you. I can at present offer no excuse for what I am about to do. I can give no explanation. When I came to Hazlewood House I hoped to be able to make it my home for so long as you would keep me. Now, I find, I am forced to leave you and

make a home of my own. Moreover, I am forced for a while at least to keep silence as to where that home may be. At this moment I have not even determined. It will, however, be out of England. I cannot even tell you why this must be so. Will you ever forgive me?

"Please do not fear on my account. I am growing old and can well take care of myself; besides, Mrs. Miller will be with me, also Harry, so that I shall not be dull.

"If I cannot promise to tell you where I am, I will at least let you hear from me now and then. Please, oh, please do not try and trace me, but do endeavour to think kindly of your loving but unhappy niece,

"BEATRICE."

"What does it mean, Herbert?" said Horace in sepulchral tones.

"What can it mean?" echoed Herbert.

They sat staring at one another and feeling that such an unlooked-for catastrophe had never before happened since the world began to be peopled by ladies and gentlemen. Their niece, the feminine counterpart of themselves; the embodiment, to their minds, of all that a well-bred, well-born woman should be, to be guilty of such an escapade. It was awful, perfectly awful!

They read the letter again and again, discussed the meaning of sentences, even of words; but this analysing process helped them nothing. So they turned to reconsider in a new light Beatrice herself as they knew her or fancied they knew her.

Although neither of the Talberts had ever felt the tender passion, it was thought by many that, if either were attacked, Herbert would be the victim. A widow anxious to re-enter the holy estate of matrimony would have directed her attention to the younger man as being of a more malleable material than the elder. There was, indeed, a vague tradition floating about that Herbert had once upon a time looked rather tenderly upon some young lady, and that had not Horace with praiseworthy selfishness promptly interfered and nipped the affair in the bud, he, Horace, might now

be living in solitude with all the cares of Hazlewood House on his shoulders. So it was Herbert who first approached the puzzle from the romantic side.

"You don't think," he said, "that Beatrice could have any—any unfortunate attachment of which we should have disapproved?"

"How could such a thing be possible?"

"We thought such a thing as her leaving us like this an impossibility."

This argument impressed Horace. He thought the matter carefully over. "No," he said, with the air of a judge giving a decision, "it is impossible. She has given no signs of such a thing. She has seemed quite happy and contented. Her appetite has, I think, been very good."

"Yes, very good," said Herbert.

"Besides, who could there be? She is also her own mistress, and if she wished to marry we have no voice in the matter. She is quite capable of having her own way. Witness her leaving all that money idle."

Horace had never got over that present of seven per cent to the bankers.

Herbert, in obedience to his brother's views, dismissed the unfortunate attachment theory and began to look for another. "I wonder," he said sadly, and after a long pause, "I wonder if we have misunderstood Beatrice's character?"

"I am almost afraid it is so," said Horace.

"She seemed so quiet and contented," sighed Herbert. "True, that affair about those people and the boy upset her."

"Now," said Horace, "I believe you are getting nearer the mark. Can it be possible that any fear that the child would be taken from her induced her to make this foolish flight—I can call it nothing else?"

Herbert objected in his turn. Beatrice had been so certain that the claim would come to nothing, and events had proved her sagacity. So they talked and talked, suggested and reasoned, but never got near the truth. They could not even frame a theory. Nothing in this world is more annoying than to be without a theory.

At last Horace rose. "Something must be done," he said decisively.

"Yes," assented Herbert inquiringly.

"We are, it appears to me, placed in a most unfortunate position. This mysterious flight involves the most grievous consequences. We must do something which I feel sure will be repugnant to both of us."

"You will not employ any one to trace her?"

"Certainly not. She is her own mistress, and can go where she chooses. I am thinking more about ourselves. Life will become intolerable if the matter gets bruited abroad."

"How can we help it? All the household knows that Beatrice has gone, and gone without any luggage."

"That," said Horace, with mild triumph, "I have thought out." He rang the bell, and asked for the parlour-maid.

"Jane," he said, "Miss Clauson has been called to London. Will you be good enough to get such things packed in her trunks as she is likely to want for a lengthy visit; also pack the nurse's box and the child's things."

Jane curtsied and withdrew. Presently she returned and asked how many dresses she had better pack?

"Two morning and four evening dresses," said Horace promptly. Herbert admired his brother's great mind, which rose so equal to the occasion.

Then Jane wanted to know which dresses. The two new ones, of course. Then what? The black silk, the black lace, the high body with jet trimmings, the brocade upper skirt, or what? For the moment even Horace was at fault. He soon recovered.

"We will come and assist you," he said.

So they went to Beatrice's room, and with eye-glasses fixed stood one on each side of the trunk and superintended the packing. Much as they delighted in odd jobs of this kind, to-day they felt no pleasure. They scarcely dared to glance at each other. They felt ashamed, as all honourable men do, who by irresistible stress of circumstances are compelled to act a lie. The packing was completed. Jane

was sent to see to Mrs. Miller's and the boy's things. The selection of these our friends did not superintend. The boxes were brought down, placed in the waggonette, and Horace and Herbert drove away with them. Nothing could have been more skilfully managed. Even Whittaker was completely deceived.

They took the boxes, and warehoused them in Blacktown. "You see," said Horace, as he turned the horses' heads homewards, "Beatrice *has* gone to London. She *means* to make a lengthy stay. She *must* want her things. Any woman would."

"Every word you spoke was the exact truth," said Herbert consolingly.

But they were horribly upset; so upset that they forgot all about Frank's impending visit, or forgot about it until the next morning, when they found it was too late to telegraph.

Frank, with "hope eternal" growing like an eucalyptus, came down, as he had forewarned his friends, by the morning train. He was rather surprised at not seeing his two tall cousins on the platform, or any signs of the waggonette outside the station. He secured a hansom, and drove straight to Hazlewood House.

Whittaker opened the door. "All well, Whittaker?" asked Carruthers cheerily. He did not hear the servant's reply, for at that moment Horace and Herbert appeared and shook hands heartily. They took him into the dining-room, and once more the three men shook hands.

"Well, how are you both?" asked Frank. They told him they were quite well, but, all the same, Frank knew by their solemn faces that something had gone wrong. He wondered what the cook had been up to.^f

"And Miss Clauson? Beatrice?" he continued with an assumption of carelessness, but longing for the door to open and admit her. The Talberts exchanged sad glances.

"Beatrice," said Horace, "is—not here."

His voice was so solemn that Frank's blood ran cold. Horace was not addicted to the use of canting colloquisms, but the words were spoken in such a way that Frank

believed "not here" must inevitably be followed by "but gone above." He was immensely relieved when the speaker stopped short.

"Not here," he said. "Gone out, you mean. My greetings must wait."

The brothers' eyes sought counsel of one another. "Beatrice went to London yesterday," said Horace. Frank seemed much astonished.

"To London! She left London only a few days ago. Is she gone back to her father's?" He was already framing excuses for leaving Hazlewood House and returning to town. An ominous silence followed his question. "What is the matter? Is anything wrong?" he asked in great agitation.

"My dear Frank," said Horace, "something strange has happened, but it is so strictly a family affair that we are considering whether we ought to mention it to you. Not but what your advice might be of service to us."

Frank grew seriously alarmed. "But I am one of the family," he said hastily. The Talberts shook their heads doubtfully. They were not sure about it. The family consisted of two, or, counting in Beatrice, three at the outside.

"I have another right to know, a stronger right still," said Carruthers, who was on thorns of suspense. "There is no reason why I should make a secret of it. I have loved Beatrice since the day we met. My one hope is to make her my wife. I claim the right to know anything that concerns her."

The astonishment depicted on the brothers' faces spoke volumes in favour of their trustful natures or Frank's circumspect love-making. "Good heavens, Frank!" ejaculated Horace.

"Yes; I asked her to marry me before I left here last autumn. She refused; I was now going to repeat my offer."

"She refused you?" asked Horace.

"Yes," said Frank sadly. "But what is the matter? For Heaven's sake tell me."

"Herbert," said Horace, "I believe this gives us the clue to the mystery." Herbert nodded.

"What clue? What mystery? My good fellows, don't you see you are driving me mad?" said Carruthers.

"Beatrice left us yesterday. This morning we received this letter." The letter was handed to Frank, and whilst he read it the brothers drew aside and talked in whispers. Frank's astonishment need not be described. Like his cousins, he could only ejaculate, "What does it mean?"

Horace and Herbert came forward. Herbert spoke. As the romantic side of the question had again turned up, it was felt right for him to be spokesman. "Frank," he said, "we do not wish to misjudge you, but the fact of Beatrice's having refused you, and of your coming down to renew the offer, makes us think that she must have fled to avoid you. We know little about such matters ourselves, but we have heard of young girls flying to get out of the way of distasteful—ahem, what shall I say?—"

"Persecution," put in Horace.

"No, the word is too strong—distasteful advances, Frank. This is, of course, a matter entirely between yourself and your conscience."

As the oration proceeded Frank stared from one to the other. Then he burst into a short peal of laughter. In spite of his anxiety about Beatrice, the situation overpowered him.

"There is nothing to laugh at, Frank," said Horace.

"There ~~is~~ madness, sheer madness in the air, my good men," said Carruthers. "Do I look like a man who would subject a woman to distasteful persecution? Hang it! I am prouder than you are. I had Beatrice's permission to come. Perhaps you may know that it was arranged that we should travel down together?"

They remembered that Beatrice had told them this, and at once saw the folly of their new theory. They apologised humbly to Frank. No man in this world could apologise more gracefully than our friends. Then they talked the whole matter over again, without any result. Frank did not say much. He wanted solitude and quiet

thought. By and by the waggonette came round to the door.

"You must excuse our not having sent to meet you," said Horace. "The truth is the roads are dirty and we could not have had the waggonette cleaned in time to take us out."

"Where are you going ; for a drive?"

"We are going to make a round of calls."

Frank marvelled, and thought that under the circumstances this social amenity might have been postponed.

"It is a painful, a most painful duty," said Horace, "but we feel it must be done. We must go round and indirectly give our friends to understand that Beatrice has left us, under everyday circumstances, to pay a long-promised visit in London. We can see no other way of arresting inquiry and scandal."

It was after hearing this that Frank understood how truly great was Horace's nature. The brothers drove off. So far as time would allow they called upon every one they could think of. They called upon Lady Bowker, who had known them from boys ; they called upon Mrs. Catesby, the stately, yet affable, well-dowered and better connected widow who loved artistic society ; they called upon the rector's wife, upon the Purtons, upon the Fletchers, upon many aristocratic and a few simply opulent persons. Being such universal favourites with the ladies they had no scruple in continuing their calls even to the very latest moment allowed by society. Then they drove home, feeling they had done all they could to throw a curtain over Beatrice's extraordinary indiscretion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN OUTRAGE ON WHITTAKER.

CARRUTHERS, when Horace and Herbert went forth at the call of duty, had asked that Beatrice's letter might be left with him. As he had fully proved his right to be admitted to the family council his request was readily granted. With the letter in his hand he went into the library and pondered what had happened. The question he had to solve was what motive could have been strong enough to force Beatrice to take such a step?

He had heard from Horace all about the claim made upon the child, and this had explained a matter which had for some days been troubling him greatly, namely, Beatrice's abrupt departure from London. But here he could see no strong motive. "The claim was abandoned, or at least lay quiescent. Besides, Beatrice, as he judged her, was far more likely to fight than to fly. He dismissed anything to do with the boy, or at least put it aside to be inquired into collaterally.

Herbert, too, had hinted his idea about an attachment. Frank having ascertained that no shadow of suspicion of such a thing hung over Beatrice, sternly put it out of sight. Besides, there were one or two recollections which he carried always with him, and which rendered such a vulgar, unworthy explanation something not far short of sacrilege.

He reckoned Beatrice a woman of superior abilities, logical and perfectly able to foresee consequences. He felt that she would not have acted as she had acted without carefully considering what it entailed. No romantic girlish impulse had hurried her away; no eccentricity of character

had led her to shape such a course. The reason, whatever it might be, was to her mind amply sufficient.

She was unhappy. Her own words said so. Did some danger overhang her? Did some evil threaten her? What danger? What evil? Why could not he, Frank Carruthers, be at her side to shield and aid? Heaven knows he would do it and seek no reward.

He groaned. He was very miserable and cast down. It was in this very room he had bemoaned his first sorrow. He had recovered from that and had encouraged himself to hope that the woman he loved would, after all, be his. And now to come and find her gone—gone without a word—gone no one knew whither—no one knew why! To feel that she was flying from some menacing evil and yet not know what. He was very unhappy.

He had come down with such news for her—news which even as a friend she would have been glad to hear. He had breathed no word of it to her in London; had resolved to say nothing about it until all was settled. At last he saw his way to giving up the drudgery of teaching what he bitterly called fools. He had for years been a thrifty man, and the money he had saved was not a small sum. For years he had dreamed of literature as a profession, and now he saw his way to a realisation of that dream. His political articles had attracted attention. He had been offered an important journalistic post. A manuscript from which he expected great things was in the printer's hands. He saw a certain amount of renown if not fortune waiting for him. All this he had come down to tell Beatrice before he went back to Oxford, wound up his affairs, and bade the classic town farewell.

It seemed as if, whenever he counted on draining the cup of joy, it was struck from his lips!

He must find Beatrice. Sacred as her wish not to be traced might be to Horace and Herbert, Frank felt that it did not affect him. He would not of course stoop to calling in detective aid, but the utmost he could do to solve the mystery should be done. To Frank, Beatrice's flight appeared in a far more serious light than it did to her uncles.

He must go and look at her portrait. There was a fine one in the drawing-room. He went there, stood before it for a long time, and to the representation of herself vowed that she was the fairest woman on earth, well worthy for a man to live or die for. Then he began to retrace his steps to the library. As he crossed the hall he saw a strange sight.

Whittaker, the irreproachable, the dignified, with indignation written in every line of his black-coated limbs, was standing at the front door against which he leaned his full weight, whilst with his right hand he was struggling with some object which prevented him from absolutely shutting the door. Closer examination showed Frank that this was the end, about six inches, of a stout walking-stick : a contemptible object, yet as it was held powerful enough to foil the old servant's efforts. Whittaker was puffing and blowing, not so much from his exertions as from anger. His face was as red as a turkey-cock's. Nothing impressed Frank more strongly with the feeling that unusual things were happening at Hazlewood House than the sight of this respectable old retainer in such abnormal difficulties.

"What's the matter?" he said, going to the door.

"It's a man, Mr. Carruthers," puffed out Whittaker.

"What does he want?"

"He asked for Miss Clauson, sir; I told him she was away from home."

"Well, what then?" Frank grew interested. The parties outside and inside remained in the deadlock.

"He asked for her address, sir; I told him I did not know."

"Well, what then?"

"He called me a damned liar, Mr. Carruthers," said Whittaker, with supreme emotion, and in a voice so low that it showed how ashamed he was of the occurrence—"a damned liar, sir." The repetition sounded almost tearful.

"Open the door and let me have a look at him," said Frank.

"I wouldn't, Mr. Carruthers, if I were you, sir. I believe he meditates making an attack of personal violence."

"Never mind, open the door. He won't personal violence me; and you can stand behind me."

This, as he was a head and shoulders taller than Frank, Whittaker felt to be sarcasm. However, being accustomed to obey, he opened the door, and Frank found himself face to face with a man about his own age. A strong-looking, muscular fellow, dressed in the very height of fashion—too far up, in fact, to look a gentleman.

Maurice Hervey, of course. Having given Beatrice more than twenty-four hours' grace, he put in execution his threat of looking her up. Not that he expected to see her; not that he was prepared with a plan of action in case she proved recalcitrant; but he knew the call would alarm her. It was only when he heard from Whittaker that she was out of town that the idea of her attempting to evade him by flight occurred to him. It completely threw him off his balance, made him disrespectful to the old servant, and even when that functionary replied as a gentleman's servant should in such straits reply, by simply closing the door, induced him to put his stick between the door and the post.

Hervey looked at Frank; Frank, little guessing what this man's existence meant to him and Beatrice, looked at Hervey. "Well?" he said coldly.

"I wish to repeat a few inquiries which I made of the servant when he so uncivilly shut the door in my face," said Hervey.

"I beg to repeat the servant's answers which you so uncivilly received," said Frank.

"You do not know her address?"

"If you are speaking of Miss Clauson, I do not."

Hervey hesitated. "You are not Mr. Talbert?" he said.

"I am not," said Frank coldly.

"Mr. Talbert can no doubt give me the information?"

"No doubt. But I presume he will want to know your reasons for asking."

"I'll wait and see him."

"I don't think you will. Of course I have no power to prevent your calling again, but you will not wait here."

Hervey scowled. "Will you try and turn me out?" he said defiantly.

"Certainly not," said Frank pleasantly. "You stand higher than I do; you must weigh two stone heavier; you look in perfect condition. Oh no, I shall merely send round to the stables and have the dogs loosed, or I may even send as far as the village and fetch the constable. I shall not interfere further than that."

Hervey muttered what Frank knew was an oath. He turned away as if about to take Frank's warning. Suddenly he changed his mind and came back.

"Does Mr. Talbert know his niece's address?" he asked.

For a second Frank felt almost sick. His interrogator had tried to ask the question as if it bore no hidden meaning, but he had failed. As by inspiration Frank knew that this man, whoever he might be, was aware that Beatrice had fled. "No," he said, looking him straight in the face, "Mr. Talbert does not know it."

Without a word Hervey turned and strode away. Frank, with his head in a ferment, walked across to the library. Dimly he guessed at something—not the truth, but something which from its vague terrors was worse than the truth. And in consequence of that half-formed guess he turned traitor at once, and began to fight on Beatrice's side, ready to aid her and to keep her uncles in the dark. He paused at the door, and called to Whittaker. Whittaker came. "You set that fellow down properly, Mr. Carruthers," he said approvingly.

"Did I? If I were you, Whittaker, I should not mention the affair to your masters."

"Sir," said Whittaker with emotion, "I should be ashamed to breathe a word about it. Both Mr. Talbert and Mr. Herbert would be so mortified at the thought of a servant of theirs being called such an opprobrious epithet."

"I should not mention it to the maids either, Whittaker."

"Sir!" exclaimed Whittaker, in a tone of great surprise.

"Ah, I forgot to whom I was speaking. I beg your pardon, Whittaker—I quite forgot."

"Yes, sir, you did," said Whittaker, with true dignity;

but, nevertheless, if only in order to show there was no ill-feeling, taking the two half-crowns which Frank tendered him.

Who was this man so anxious to ascertain Beatrice's whereabouts? Leaving out of the question his ungentlemanly behaviour to Whittaker, instinct told Carruthers that he was not of the class from which Beatrice drew her friends. Spurious metal; no eighteen carat stamp anywhere, he felt certain. Horace and Herbert would look gentlemen, whether dressed in the pink of fashion or lounging about in rags—not that they ever did the latter—so, although he was too modest to add his own name, would Frank Carruthers. But this fellow!

. Suddenly Carruthers started from his unhappy musings. Why had he let the man go? Why not have forced him to say for what purpose he wanted the address? He took his hat, and ran quickly down the drive and along the lane in the hope of overtaking the man. He ran right down to the village, but saw nothing of him. Hervey had caught a passing cab, and was now well on his way back to Blacktown, and carrying the pleasant reflection that Beatrice's manner of getting out of her difficulty had put him into a cleft stick. He began to wish he had been contented with money, and foregone revenge. In the nineteenth century an attempt at revenge proves a failure in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred.

Although Carruthers did not find the man he wanted he found some one else—Sylvanus Mordle. Sylvanus and his tricycle formed the centre of a sympathetic group of villagers. Something had gone wrong with the metal steed, and the curate, smiling as if a foundered tricycle was one of the greatest unexpected blessings that can visit a clergyman, was examining wheels, spokes, cranks, and chains. Various suggestions, some prompted by rustic wit, were hazarded by lookers-on. "Got the staggers;" "Want's a feed, poor thing;" "Light a fire under him, sir," etc. etc. Sylvanus took the jokes of his flock in good part, but, presently looking up, saw Carruthers among the spectators. He left his helpless machine, and the two friends shook hands warmly.

"Here," said Mordle, turning to his flock, "bring that affair to my house, some of you. Now, old fellow," to Frank, "come and have a chat. Heard you were to be down this week. Come to my lodgings." He took Frank's arm and swept him away.

"Can't give you more than a cup of tea," he continued, "tobacco and tea—that's the worst of being in the Church. Can't dare to offer a friend whisky until after ten o'clock at night. An enemy might go by unawares."

He rattled on merrily, and appeared to be in the highest spirits. This, of course, was because he felt certain that Frank's second visit to Oakbury would not have been paid had Beatrice remained an unattainable prize. Frank only came again, because he felt sure that a second attempt would mean success.

"Lots to say to you—lots," jerked out Sylvanus, as they entered his rooms. "Fanshawe writes me that you are going to give up coaching. Want to hear all about it; but wait till the tea's made. Ever see me make tea?"

"Wonderful thing tea is," he continued. "Cheap tea helps Christianity tremendously. Great blessing." He put the already steaming kettle fully on the fire, and opened a canister. "I—I, Sylvanus Mordle, found out the error of modern tea-making. People make it as they made it twenty years ago, when it cost seven-and-six a pound—spoonful each head, and one for the pot. I go on a sliding scale, according to price." He absolutely shovelled in the tea, and dashed the boiling water on it. "Now two minutes, and then pour. The aroma, the soul of the tea, is caught. Taste!"

Frank thought that even an aroma must be cunning and subtle if it managed to escape this bustling, energetic parson. The tea was certainly good.

"Now," said Mordle, stretching out his long legs, "tell me the news."

During the process of tea-making Frank had been reflecting. He saw that he wanted aid—more aid than Horace and Herbert, whose one idea was to conceal Beatrice's flight from the neighbouring gossips, could give him. He

knew that Sylvanus was true as steel, and would keep the secret. He hoped to gather from him some useful particulars as to Beatrice's everyday life during the last few months. So he told Sylvanus the news—the whole news.

And having told it, Frank Carruthers saw what few, very few in this world have ever seen—that was the Rev. Sylvanus Mordle looking the picture of utter misery and self-reproach. The change in the man positively startled Carruthers.

"It's been on my mind ever since," said Mordle dejectedly.

"What's been on your mind? For mercy's sake speak out if you have any clue to give."

"I have been very wrong. I ought never to have yielded. But I did. I couldn't refuse."

"Did what? Pull yourself together, and tell me what you mean."

Mordle did so, and gave Frank the whole history of the expedition to Blacktown. Frank, who a few hours before had heard all about the Rawlings's claim, tried to relieve Mordle's mind, and to a certain extent succeeded. However, the curate still retained the impression that the visit to the "Cat and Compasses" was in some way responsible for the girl's flight. Frank had some trouble to get him to promise to withhold his confession from the Talberts.

He resolved to find this woman whom Beatrice had visited, and to learn what occurred at the interview. He felt half inclined to veer round to Horace's original theory, that Beatrice had fled to insure her pet's safety. Perhaps the man with whom Whittaker had struggled was a lawyer's emissary. Beatrice might have paid her mysterious visit in order to delay proceedings. If so, her strange act was but an act of folly, and all would come right in the end.

He tried very hard to take this view of the case, but he could not. No, there was more, much more, in the background, and he felt that the man he had seen held the key of the puzzle. He cursed his own unreadiness of resource in having let him go so easily.

CHAPTER XXV.

ANOTHER PAINFUL TASK.

THE dinner that night at Hazlewood House was a dreary affair. Frank did not see his hosts until the gong sounded. Their calls had kept them so long that they were obliged to dress in undue haste to avoid unpunctuality in their own persons, a thing which would have amounted to a kind of moral suicide. The conversation whilst Whittaker was in the room was naturally forced. Frank could indeed tell them of the contemplated change in his life, but as all the while he was thinking how Beatrice would have received the news, his communication was made with none of his usual vivacity. Horace and Herbert were mildly astonished. They trusted—in that way which implies doubt—that it would be for the best. To give up a certainty for an uncertainty seemed a pity; but of course Frank knew his own business best. A remark with which Mr. Carruthers mentally agreed.

It seemed quite in order with the misfortunes of the house that the bottle of 1858 should have been shaken in some way and appeared cloudy, not to say thick. It might have been as thick as pea-soup for all Frank cared.

Nothing, or next to nothing, was said during dessert about the recent painful event. Frank sat moody and silent. He was working out problems; connecting Beatrice's flight with the man of the afternoon and the visit to the inn. For Beatrice's sake he was now fighting for his own hand. Horace and Herbert he eliminated from the inquiry.

His moodiness affected his hosts, and upon his refusal to take more wine they suggested an adjournment to the

drawing-room. Frank agreed readily. At any rate he could sit there and gaze at Beatrice's portrait.

"Do you mean to take any further steps?" he asked.

"I think not," said Horace. "Herbert and I have talked the matter over and feel there is no more to be done. We saw a great many people this afternoon, and I am sure have left a general impression that Beatrice has gone to visit friends."

"It was a most painful duty," said Herbert, "but one we felt must be performed. In fact, it was due to ourselves to forestall gossip."

"I am sure Frank quite understands the situation," said Horace.

A satirical smile curled round Frank's lips. "It must have been most painful," he said; "you must have felt like two Spartan boys with a joint fox under their clothes."

"Yes," said Herbert simply, "we did."

"I have often heard the simile used," said Horace, "but its great strength never struck me until now."

Carruthers gave a short quick laugh; he could not help it. The brothers looked surprised. They could see no reason for any approach to merriment. A biting sarcasm came to the young man's lips, but he restrained it, and in a moment was glad he had done so. It would have wounded these two kind, mild-looking men, who, no doubt, were as unable to realise the anxiety raised in his breast by Beatrice's flight, as he was unable to comprehend the importance of the consequences which they were making such sacrifices to avert. Seeing things in the same light is a matter of constitution, education, and training.

Just then Whittaker brought in tea, and whilst he handed it round, Frank had leisure to rejoice, inasmuch as he had kept his tongue in command. But misfortune had not yet done with Hazlewood House. Frank, in moving his arm, knocked down a cup, and sent its scalding contents over one of the several delicious little Chippendale tables, the pride of the Talberts' hearts and the envy of their lady friends.

The simile of the Spartan boy and the fox must have

seemed even more appropriate to Horace and Herbert as they smilingly assured Frank it was of no consequence, none whatever. They did not even ring for aid. This, however, was because Whittaker, who had witnessed the catastrophe, was already on his way to the scene with an armful of soft cloths. He mopped, and dabbed, and wiped the table as tenderly as a mother might perform the ablutions of an infant who suffered from some irritation of the skin. Horace and Herbert watched him for a while, and then, no doubt thinking their apparent carelessness had eased Frank's mind, joined in the rubbing and wiping. They twisted up corners of their glass-cloths and poked them into every little corner and interstice exactly as a cleanly nurse would have explored the ears and eyes of her infant charge. Frank was compelled to stand by all the time and feel what a clumsy ruffian he had been. He sighed his relief as Whittaker at last gathered up the dusters and departed.

Conversation languished. The misfortune to the table seemed to have driven Beatrice into the background. There is nothing like a second grief for driving out the first. Frank felt that Horace and Herbert were still thinking of that ill-used piece of furniture. He was right. Presently Horace slipped out of the room and returned with a small bottle of furniture-polish and a piece of flannel. Gravely and deliberately he began polishing his slender-legged Chippendale treasure.

Frank could stand it no longer. There is a limit to penance, namely, human endurance. His nerves, after the events of the day, were highly strung, and he felt that if he watched Horace any longer he must burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. "Can't we go and smoke?" he said.

"Certainly," said Herbert, whose mind was now more easy about the table. He accompanied Frank to the dining-room, where, by and by, Horace joined them. He brought with him an unmistakable odour of furniture-polish, so that Frank's remorse was, by the medium of his olfactory nerves, still kept awake.

"There is another painful duty to perform," said Horace, helping himself to a cigarette. Frank could not help thinking that the unmentioned painful duty was connected with the table. "We feel that we are bound to let Sir Maingay know what has happened."

"Of course. He is her father."

"Yes, he must be told. We think it better to make the communication orally." Horace was one who never misused the word "verbal." "We shall run up to town to-morrow and see him."

Frank had already been framing in his mind various excuses for a sudden departure. He felt that, fond as he was of Horace and Herbert, their constant society would at the present juncture drive him half mad. He jumped at the chance of escape. "I'll go with you," he said.

They protested against this, but Frank was firm. "My dear fellows," he said, "I have opened my heart to you. I have told you my true reason for paying this visit. How can I possibly stay here with Beatrice away?"

He had his way. It was arranged they should all go to London on the morrow. Frank suggested that before going they should inquire if Beatrice had drawn any money from the bank. So on their way through the town the next day Horace and Herbert had an interview with Messrs. Furlong and Co., and ascertained that their niece had taken one thousand pounds with her.

When they came out of the Bank they found Frank missing. Indeed, he kept them waiting fully five minutes before he reappeared. He had just been round the corner, he said, looking at some of the quaint old Blacktown houses. The truth is, he had been to the "Cat and Compasses," seen the expansive widowed landlady, and ascertained the address of her worthy friend, Mrs. Rawlings. No doubt the Talberts could have given him this, but he did not care to trouble them for it.

As William Giles had accompanied his masters in order to drive the horses back, the Talberts, until they were in the train, could not make known to Frank the result of their inquiries at the Bank. Frank heard the news gloomily.

The sum taken by Beatrice showed that she meant her absence to be a prolonged one.

"Did you get the numbers of the notes?" he asked. They had not done so.

"I should get them. The first one she changes can be traced back, and we shall know where she is."

"I should never have thought of that," said Herbert admiringly.

Horace said nothing. Conscience told him he would not have thought of it, but self-respect bade him hide the fact.

In London they parted. The Talberts went to their favourite hotel, and Frank, who wished to be quite free and unfettered in his researches, went to his. The next day the brothers called on Sir Maingay Clauson, and Frank found the way to 142 Gray Street, the purveying establishment of Messrs. Rawlings Bros.

He asked for Mrs. Rawlings, and not knowing whether it was Mrs. John or Mrs. Joseph, was compelled to describe her as the one who had been at Blacktown some few days ago. That was Mrs. John. Mr. and Mrs. John were away. Would not be back for at least a week. No one knew exactly where they were. In their absence, caused perhaps by another wild-goose chase after a supposed son, Frank was compelled to defer his researches. His heart was very heavy. It seemed to him that he would only find Beatrice by the prosaic way of tracing back the bank-notes. He wished he had not suggested this course to Horace and Herbert.

He went down to Oxford and settled his affairs as best he could. He arranged with Mordle's friend, Fanshawe, a brother coach, to take such pupils as he could send him. So utterly unfit did he feel for work that he was glad to think that his new appointment did not become a fact for six months; so that, except for the book which he had to see through the press, he would have nothing to occupy him but the search for Beatrice.

Horace and Herbert were more successful in their call. Sir Maingay was at home and appeared delighted to see

them. But this effusiveness only covered a certain fear with which, perhaps on account of their striking resemblance to his dead wife, the baronet always regarded his tall, grave brothers-in-law. To my mind, a widower who marries again had better make a clean sweep of all his first wife's relations. A painful duty, yet due to one's self, as the Talberts would say.

"So glad, so very glad, to see you, Horace; so delighted, Herbert," exclaimed Sir Maingay. "How well you both look! never saw you looking better."

They told him they were very well.

"You don't seem to grow a day older. No family cares to vex you. Most men keep young as bachelors. A family means responsibility as well as pleasure, you know." Sir Maingay nodded his head contentedly as one who knows all about it.

Just then a tremendous clatter took place overhead. It sounded like the beating of wood on ringing metal. "Repairs, I suppose?" said Horace.

"Oh no. I expect that's my young rogues at play—sturdy young rascals they are," added the fond, middle-aged parent as the din increased.

"The nursery seems very near," said Herbert. Horace looked very disgusted.

"It isn't the nursery," said the baronet. "I expect they're in the bath-room, just overhead. They get in there sometimes and beat my sponge bath with their ninespins. We all liked that sort of thing when we were boys, you know."

Horace and Herbert were silent. They knew little about the ways of children, but felt it a cruel libel on themselves to suggest that they had in their most unthinking years ever been guilty of such conduct.

"I'll ring and stop the rogues," said Sir Maingay. "I'll have them brought down here. You'd like to see my boys, wouldn't you, Horace? You would, Herbert?"

An affirmative trembled on Herbert's kind lips, but Horace sternly interposed. "No; not just yet, Maingay; we have come to see you about an important matter. But we can wait till—the boys have done."

Fortunately at that moment some one less indulgent than the father must have captured the little boys and led them away. Serious conversation was once more a possibility.

"We have something to say to you about Beatrice," said Horace.

Now Beatrice was the very last subject which Sir Maingay cared to discuss with his brothers-in-law. Although they had never said so much, he felt that they altogether disapproved of his conduct with respect to his daughter. He felt that they thought he should not have gone abroad and left her to herself, although she had been so left by her own expressed wish. To some people, especially those whose consciences were ill at ease, the Talberts' grave, unspoken censure was more terrible than vituperation from any one else.

"About Beatrice," said Sir Maingay. "Not ill, I hope? I thought her looking far from well when she left here."

"No, she is not ill—but we are in some anxiety on her account."

"Ah, I think I know. I think I'm quite prepared for what you are going to say."

Horace raised his eyebrows. "You are!" he said. "If so, it will make our task easier."

"Much easier," said Herbert.

"Well, you are going to say that young Carruthers is in love with my girl. He came here once or twice; I saw it then. He told me he was going down to your place."

"Yes, that is part of what we were going to say." They had decided it was as well to let Sir Maingay know of Frank's ambition.

"Well," said the baronet, "I like Carruthers. Besides, he is a kinsman of yours. I assure you, my dear Horace, my dear Herbert, I can never forget the many happy years spent with poor—" he actually hesitated for the name. Think of that all young wives who believe that your husbands will be inconsolable should death remove you!—"with a much-beloved member of your family."

"Thank you," said Horace quietly. He recognised the fact that Sir Maingay meant well.

"Besides," continued the baronet, "Beatrice is entirely her own mistress. She has a will of her own. I have no power over her fortune, which, by the bye, is almost as large as my own. This is just as it should be, because with those sons of mine it will be impossible for me to add to her income at my death." So he rattled on, bringing out what was really a justification of himself.

"My dear Maingay," said Horace mildly, "would it not be better if you heard what we have to say and made your comments afterwards?"

"It would be a great deal better, Maingay," said Herbert.

• From the days of their first acquaintance they had always assumed this air of superiority over the respectable nobleman. He had never even struggled against it. So he obeyed and was silent.

They told him all about Beatrice. Her letter they could not show him, having forgotten to ask Frank to return it. Sir Maingay listened, but did not appear much upset.

"We will of course take any steps you wish, or aid you in any steps you may take," said Horace, in conclusion.

"It's a nuisance, but I don't see any steps to be taken," said Sir Maingay composedly.

"Neither do we. But we felt it right you should know at once."

"Quite so. As I said, Beatrice always had a will of her own. She is full of strange freaks—full of them. As you know, for some extraordinary reasons, she wouldn't be presented, and can't live in the same house with her mother——"

"Her mother!" exclaimed the Talberts in a breath, and glancing simultaneously at a certain picture on the wall; an upright landscape which filled the space once occupied by the portrait of Sir Maingay's "ALL."

The baronet coloured. "With my wife, I mean. You may be sure this is but a freak of the girl's. She has her maid with her, you say—a respectable, middle-aged woman.

Oh, it will be all right. Perhaps she means to write a book. Ladies do all sorts of things to write books nowadays. Lady Fanny Beaumont went through Patagonia and shot some niggers or something. There's another lady who roughs it in Italy and Spain. Fancy Spain, Herbert! You know what a beastly hole Spain is. Women do all sorts of out-of-the-way things now."

"Some women," said Horace severely. His ideal woman, if he had one, did no strange things. "However, if you are contented there is nothing more to say."

"I'm not contented. It's a nuisance to think of a child you love wandering Heaven knows where. But she'll turn up all right again. Ah! here's my wife; we'll hear what she thinks of it."

Lady Clauson entered looking, as usual, very beautiful. Horace and Herbert rose and greeted her with solemn gallantry. They were always particularly attentive and courteous to Sir Maingay's second wife. This the lady attributed to her charms. She was quite wrong. The Talberts were only anxious to show that if Sir Maingay chose to marry again it was a matter of no concern to them.

Lady Clauson was told the news. She turned to her husband triumphantly. As many better bred people sometimes do, she forgot herself. "I always told you she would do something disgraceful," said her ladyship.

"My dear! my dear Isabel!" said Sir Maingay. He glanced timidly at his brothers-in-law.

Horace and Herbert rose like two figures worked by one spring. Their calm eyes looked down their straight noses and concentrated their gaze on Lady Clauson, who turned very red.

"Madam," said Horace, "the members of our family, and, I believe I may say, of Sir Maingay's family, are not in the habit of doing disgraceful things. Beatrice may have left us unadvisedly, but I am certain her reason, if known, would meet with her father's and with our approval."

Lady Clauson at once saw her mistake and apologised humbly. An apology which the brothers accepted grace-

fully. Then after having been shown the nursery treasures they took their leave.

"Maingay does not improve as he grows older," said Horace. Herbert shook his head mournfully as one who wished to gainsay a fact but dare not.

Lady Clauson, in spite of her apology, told her husband that Beatrice had done something disgraceful. "Oh no, my dear," said Sir Maingay. "It's only a freak. You know, I won't say for what reason, she can't come back here to live. Well, she's grown tired of life down at Oakbury. I don't wonder at it. Horace and Herbert are two regular old women. They darn their own stockings, make antimacassars, and all sorts of things. She was ashamed to say she was tired of the life, so went off on her own account."

Here was yet another motive attributed to Beatrice. Nothing is more risky than the attributing of motives. It is as dangerous as prophesying before the event.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A WORD IN SEASON.

AFTER one or two unsuccessful attempts Carruthers found Mrs. John Rawlings installed behind the family counter at No. 142 Gray Street. She was very hard at work—no doubt endeavouring to make up for her husband's repeated absences. In her hands she held what appeared like a long salmon-coloured two-inch rope, which, by a dexterous twist of the wrist, or some manipulation only known to the initiated, she was rapidly transforming into ornamental and symmetrical festoons of those luscious articles of diet, sausages. Upon learning that Carruthers wished to speak to her in private, she wiped her hands on a cloth, and lifting up a flap, or species of drawbridge, in the counter, begged he would step through and follow her upstairs.

He did so, and was shown into what Mrs. Rawlings called the parlour; a room papered with a startling paper, carpeted with a dazzling carpet; furnished with imitation walnut chairs and couch upholstered in the brightest blue tapestry; the mantelpiece bearing a mirror in a burnished gilt frame, and, among other gay ornaments, a huge pair of those glass vases with suspended prisms known as lustres; the fire glowed very brightly, and was kept in order by a fender and fire-irons of flashing steel. It was, in fact, a room which appeared to open its eyes and glare at you as you entered. A man even more anxious and preoccupied than Frank was could not fail to be struck with the general effect. It would have been positively ungracious not to have noticed it.

"What a bright room!" he said.

"It is a bright room," said Mrs. Rawlings in a gratified way. "You see, sir, we often kill as many as thirty pigs before breakfast."

This seemed a digression without bearing upon the main subject. "Poor things!" said Frank, without making it clear whether he referred to the pigs or their slayers.

"At first, when I married Rawlings, I found it a melancholy business; so I made up my mind to have everything away from the factory bright and cheerful."

"You have succeeded here," said Frank, as he took the azure-covered chair offered him.

"I hope so. You see, sir," continued Mrs. Rawlings, "every business has its drawbacks as well as its advantages. Many don't like the pork business, but it's a nice clean business—there's no dust about it like there is about baking. I hate dust of any sort."

At another time Carruthers might have been amused and have tried to draw this woman out, but he was now only anxious to hear about Beatrice, so he commenced his inquisition.

Yes; Mrs. Rawlings had been at Blacktown. She had stayed at the "Cat and Compasses." She, or rather her husband, had believed a little boy to be their missing son. A young lady had called upon her one morning. She gave no name, but she was a tall young lady; very handsome; and with gray eyes; beautifully dressed; in fact quite a young lady. Yes, poor thing! quite a lady.

Would Mrs. Rawlings tell her visitor what had been said or done at that interview? Oh no—never. The good woman shut her eyes, compressed her lips, and shook her head slowly and solemnly. The combined effects of these actions being meant to show that Beatrice's communication was for ever locked up in the sacred repository of her heart.

Mrs. Rawlings really meant to keep Beatrice's secret, and doubtless had no pressure been applied she would have kept it loyally. But unluckily she was one of those who have to struggle to retain a secret, not only its main body, but little corners which would slip out unawares. In trying

to guard Beatrice's secret from her visitor's renewed questions, she was like one trying to pack a feather-bed into a travelling trunk ; as one part was pushed down another part rose up. The words "poor thing !" applied to Beatrice had already raised Frank's curiosity to the highest pitch, and made him believe that the present inquiry was not collateral.

Was he justified in striving to learn what Beatrice wished hid ? He thought so. He loved her with pure, unselfish love ; so unselfish that he was not endeavouring to find the cause of her flight for his own ends, but in order to be able to give her aid if she required it. Yes, the man who loved her had a right to try and learn all about the woman whom he believed loved him. Besides, had Beatrice in any way bound this woman to secrecy ? He could scarcely believe it. He fancied that Mrs. Rawlings, as some people will, was making a mystery of nothing. Beatrice may have given her money to withdraw the absurd claim, and she was ashamed to confess the fact.

"Look here," said Carruthers. "I must and will know what took place between you and the lady. I warn you that by concealment you may do her the greatest wrong. You cannot harm her by telling the truth."

Again Mrs. Rawlings shut her eyes and shook her head.

Again Frank pressed her, again and again. She still kept her secret, but ever and anon, by means of some unguarded expression, let a corner slip out. So much so that Frank fully realised the fact that Beatrice was driven to seek that interview by some great stress, some grievous need. He began to fancy that in spite of her denial in knowledge even of her name, Mrs. Rawlings might be able to tell all about the flight.

"Can you tell me where to find her ?" he asked. "I warn you if you withhold her address from me you may do her a wrong which may never be repaired."

He spoke earnestly and impressively, fixing his eyes upon the woman as he spoke. He wished to learn from her looks whether she knew the address or not.

A sudden inspiration seized Mrs. Rawlings. Inspiration

may come to a purveyor as well as to a poet. This young man, this eager young fellow, was the cause of all the shame and mischief—what secret was there to keep from him? He might be right; incalculable harm might follow her silence.

"You want to find her?" she asked. "You don't know where she is?"

"I want to find her. I shall never rest until I find her." His manner told Mrs. Rawlings that her inspiration was correct. She rose and spoke with real emotion.

"Yes, sir," she said, "go and find her. Go and do what is right. If you are the man, I think your conscience will tell you what to do. Oh, sir, make what amends you can while there is time. Life is uncertain. It is things of this sort which haunt a man on his deathbed."

The look of surprise which at first sat on Frank's face turned to one of something like horror. "Go on," he said hoarsely.

"Perhaps I am wronging you," went on the woman. "Perhaps you did not know all. She said the child was born in secrecy. Perhaps you never knew it. But go to her now, sir, and make what amends you can. It's not for me to speak, but what can a gentleman want for his wife more than a beautiful, proud-looking young lady like this. Dear, dear! what she must have suffered, poor thing."

Carruthers was ghastly. His hands grasped the table for support. Mrs. Rawlings glanced at him and felt that her impromptu oration was doing its work.

"There, don't take on so," she said kindly. "There may be excuses for you. Old people oughtn't to judge the young too severely."

"Tell me all she said, every word," gasped Carruthers. He had forced the woman to give him this bitter cup, and he meant to drain it to the dregs.

"Oh, poor dear! she told me all. Told me how she had been forced to make her secret known by my husband's claiming the child. My heart bled for her. She told me how no one knew about the baby; how she should have to let all be revealed unless I helped her. She told me how she had longed for her child, and somehow, I don't know

how, managed to get it to live with her or near her. Oh, it's such a pretty boy! Such a pretty boy, sir."

"Where can I find her?" asked Carruthers. Not that he now hoped to learn.

"Where? I suppose somewhere near the child, down at Blacktown. You know the lady's name. I don't. But you'll do what's right, won't you, sir?"

"Yes," said Frank. "I will do what is right. Thank you. Good-morning."

He left the room, and departed by the way he had come. Mrs. Rawlings returned to her interesting occupations. She knew the name neither of her visitor nor of the lady whom she had seen at Blacktown; but to this day, when she recalls the look of what she believed to be remorse on the young man's face, she is happy in the thought that it may be a few heartfelt and appropriate words, though only spoken by a humble woman like herself, which helped on the great fight of good against evil, righted a wrong, and made a sister woman happier. May such a mistake occur to many of us. It causes consolation.

A worthy soul Mrs. Rawlings. Nevertheless, we will now bid her adieu, and hope that the business in Gray Street continues to flourish.

But Frank Carruthers! Poor Frank, whose researches had led him into such straits,—who had learnt the terrible half-truth which by a paradox is often greater than the whole. Carruthers walked and walked—out of Gray's Road—on and on—without heeding whither. Such grief as he felt to-day was a new experience in a man's life. When some three months ago Beatrice told him she could not love him, the shock, as we know, was great, but in spite of it Beatrice was still the Beatrice of his dreams. Then there was hope; there is always hope in such cases. But now none! Not a vestige!

He laughed bitterly as he thought of the hours he had spent endeavouring to find the cause of what he had called Beatrice's complaint—of her general apathy and indifference to the world at large. Now he had got at the very germ of the disease. No wonder she was cold and reserved with

such a secret to carry—such a dread overhanging her. Poor girl! Poor girl!

He could see how the boy's coming to Hazlewood House had been arranged. Through Mrs. Miller, of course. And by his new light he was able to explain a discrepancy which had always troubled him. On the night when she bade him hope and wait, the nurse had told him that Beatrice had saved her years ago from starvation, whereas Horace had told him, that until she came to the house she was a stranger to them all. He had not thought it worth while to pursue the inquiry.

She, this strangely-mannered woman, had made him promise to wait. Wait for what? There was nothing to wait for. Even if he, as he scornfully told himself he could, should forget his manhood and be willing to take Beatrice as his wife even now, he knew that a barrier, never to be climbed, would be raised by her. He did not wrong her in this. He knew that for all that had befallen she was mourning in mental sackcloth and ashes. He had no blame to give her, no stone to cast.

She had not tried to win his love. She had not accepted that love when offered. Too well he knew why. Yet he knew also that she loved him—loved him but would never be his. The thought drove him half mad. No friend of Carruthers's would have known him as, with heavy brows and bent head, he walked through those quiet streets of suburban London.

But why the flight? No new dread, no new danger, could have threatened her. Did she after all fly because he was coming to Hazlewood House? Did she fear that her resolution must give way, and with one breath she must avow her love, and with the next tell her lover that love could not be between them? No. A word from her would have stayed his coming. She had even as good as asked him to come. She was not flying from him.

Then the thought of that man who was seeking her came to his mind. He shuddered and bit his lip; he knew not why. But his first thought was to trace this unknown man and hear why he wanted Beatrice.

His mood changed. He would not seek him. He had no more to learn. After what he had this morning heard, all inquiries, all information, could but tend to make him more miserable. There was nothing now left for him in the world but sheer hard work. Work, work, work, the greatest blessing ever given to man.

So he walked on and on, almost crying in his anguish, almost raving at his utter helplessness to mend matters. But all the while, do what he could to tear his idol out of her shrine, thinking of her as the calm, fair, stately girl he had known and loved, the one of all the world against whom slander should raise no voice.

Before his aimless walk was ended his mood had grown soft and pitying. Anger had simply faded away. All he could now think of was Beatrice and her sorrow. All he asked was to be able to see her and tell her there was one who would ever be as a brother to her. The wild resolve that he would now acquiesce in her disappearance as calmly as did her uncles disappeared. He would find her. He would go to her, take her hand, tell her the secret was his, counsel her, and if it were possible stand between her and what she had to bear.

But he knew now, or thought he knew, the utmost that life had to give him, and he saw in it a sorry substitute for what it had seemed to promise only a few days ago.

Blame her! Why should he blame her? How had she wronged him?

CHAPTER XXVII.

A HELPING HAND.

To make up one's mind, to vow to find a young woman who has disappeared without leaving a trace, is one thing—to find her is another. The world is a place of considerable size, and chance meetings are not so common as the confiding novel reader is asked to believe. Such was at least the experience of two men, who, from different motives, were equally anxious to find the fugitive. The first, Maurice Hervey; the second, Frank Carruthers.

Hervey, who, having paid a second visit to Oakbury, had in some way managed to learn that Beatrice, the boy, and the nurse had gone to London, bade a hasty adieu to Blacktown and returned to the capital. The more he studied the situation the more apparent it became that—to use his own words—he was in a cleft stick. So long as Beatrice could conceal her whereabouts from him, so long was he utterly helpless. He could, of course, compass a certain amount of revenge, but the cost would be too terrific. However sweet a thing may be, it may be bought too dearly. He could walk boldly up to Sir Maingay Clauson and proclaim himself his son-in-law. He could go to these Talberts and show them that he married their niece when she was little more than a schoolgirl. But what good would this do? His bolt would be shot, and his quiver held no other. It might bring down Beatrice but not her money. He would have to deal with men of the world instead of a woman, over whom he held the terror of exposure. He had one article to sell—silence. There was one customer for it—his wife. With her he could trade to advantage,

but the moment he broke luck for another market his commodity became all but valueless.

Again, there was that cursed clause in old Talbert's will. Hervey could easily prove that Beatrice was his wife, but in doing so he also proved that she had married, when under age, without her trustees' consent, and the said trustees could do almost exactly as they liked with her fortune. Probably they would throw him two hundred a year so long as he kept out of the way. What was two hundred a year when we know that had he not insisted on bringing some one's head down to the dust he might have had ten times the amount? Why had he not taken the money and foregone his revenge?

In fact, Beatrice's flight, although not effected for strategic reasons, was a masterpiece; a move which bound her enemy hand and foot. Savagely he looked forward to the time when circumstances would force him to take the best offer made him. Well he knew that the moment Beatrice nerved herself to reveal the truth to her friends, the moment she elected to confess her girlish folly, and face what shame and blame might be due to her, every shred of power he held would be gone. It was, therefore, imperative he should find Beatrice and re-open negotiations upon a basis more favourable to her. Reflection and the risk he now ran of losing everything made him inclined to lower his demands. He would take fifteen hundred, even a half of his wife's income, and if she wished it, would enter into a regular deed of judicial separation. He would be silent so long as the money was paid, or so long as it paid him better to be silent.

What if he gave out that he was dead and waited until she had married again? Then his sway would be supreme. But to gain this advantage he must lie silent, it might be for years, and in the meantime must somehow make a living. Perhaps, after her former experience, she would not marry again. Any way the state of his exchequer put a veto on the waiting scheme.

He expected no unextorted help from her. He looked for no mercy. He had shown none. He had blasted

her life; robbed her years of early womanhood of their sweetness; he had traded on the romance which lies in the heart of every young girl, then, for mercenary purposes, had turned and crushed it out. He had shown her, nay, had, in brutal words, told her that he had married her to raise money in order to save himself from the penalty due to his crime. He well knew what he had done, and knowing this he had not even ventured at attempting to cajole her when they measured strength at Blacktown. Had it been needed, the stern set of her features, the scorn of her manner, would have told him that he had no mercy to expect, that it was a duel between the two.

He must find her! As the months went on the necessity of finding her became more and more obvious. He had, after the manner of a gambler, who feels that any hour may bring the great stroke of luck, lived luxuriously. His money had by now so diminished that he saw he must shortly do one of three things—find Beatrice, earn money, or starve.

The first, the most desirable course in every way, seemed impossible. He had made, both in person and vicariously, such inquiries at Sir Maingay's house as could be made without exciting comment and suspicion. He had even been down once more to Oakbury, seen the Talberts, but had learnt nothing to his advantage. So course number one could not be counted upon to meet the emergency.

Course number three, if the simplest, was the most unpleasant, so he was constrained to adopt number two; at least, provisionally.

Before his disgrace Hervey had occasionally done some work for illustrated periodicals. As this branch of his late profession seemed to offer him the best chance of supplying his needs, he called upon two or three people whom he had known in former days, and who, moreover, knew what had caused his protracted absence. He simply said he was anxious to redeem the past and begged for a helping hand. Selfish as the world is supposed to be, there are many willing to help a fallen man on to his legs. Hervey received one or two promises which might or might not lead to remunerative work.

The months passed very dismally and drearily for the second seeker, Frank Carruthers. He knew not where to turn, where to look for Beatrice. However, he was better off than Hervey, for he had direct intelligence from her. Once a month she had written to her uncles, but her letters gave no clue that could be followed. They bore no address; they were posted in London; they mentioned no places, not even a country. She said she was living an exceedingly quiet, calm life. She longed to see dear old Oakbury again, and wondered if it would ever be her lot to do so. In each letter she regretted the necessity for the step she had taken, and hoped that if ever her uncles knew her true reason for it they would forgive her. She trusted, nevertheless, that they would never learn it. The only hints at locality in any one of her letters were that she mentioned that the weather was bitterly cold, and also that she spent much time studying art—was, indeed, learning to paint in oils.

These letters Herbert, who felt sympathy for his cousin, sent on to Frank, and Frank perused them again and again, endeavouring by the light he had gained to read between the lines. And the more he read the more mystified he became. If Mrs. Rawlings's tale was true, there was something which Herbert and Horace never could, never would forgive; yet Beatrice wrote as if forgiveness was not an impossibility. Moreover, it struck Frank that her words expressed a doubt as to whether her uncles had learnt the reason for her flight. When should he find her? When should he learn the whole truth?

He searched her letters in vain for his own name, for any message to him. The omission troubled him, not because he thought himself forgotten, but because it showed him that Beatrice felt there was a fate, which nothing could overcome, keeping them apart. So her letters gave him no hope.

Had he been an idle man Frank Carruthers could never have borne those months of suspense. But he was hard, very hard at work on a second book. Believe me, a man does not write his worst when his heart is sad. A deficiency

of the gastric juice or a superabundance of lithic acid may ruin a man's work, but not necessarily grief. Toothache may prove fatal to inspiration, but heartache need not. So pending the appearance of his first book, which had for some reason been delayed, Frank was busy with a successor.

About that first book, a satirical semi-political novel, which, by the bye, made a great hit, Mr. Carruthers, like all new writers, was as nervous and fidgety as a young husband whose beloved wife is for the first time about to increase the population. One day it struck him that the great work would be more taking if adorned with illustrations. He mentioned his idea to the publishers, who quite agreed with him, only adding that six full-page illustrations would cost so many pounds, an expense they did not feel justified in incurring. But if Mr. Carruthers liked to bear the cost, well and good. Frank, who had money to spare, said he would see for how much he could get them done.

He called upon a friend, a Mr. Field, who knew all about such matters, and inquired where he could find hands competent yet not too costly. And this friend happened to be one of those from whom Maurice Hervey had begged a helping hand. So it will be seen that the hereinafter-mentioned meeting between Carruthers and Hervey was, like all so-called chance meetings, when traced back to its cause, quite a natural sequence. Indeed, it is hard to see how things could have happened otherwise.

"There, a fellow called on me a day or two ago," said Mr. Field, "a fellow who's down on his luck now. He might suit you."

"Can you recommend him? What is his name?"

"I don't know that I can recommend him, but you may give him a trial. He calls himself Henry Morris. He's down on his luck, as I said."

"Write him a line and ask him to call on me," said Carruthers, who liked to help men down on their luck. "Is he clever?"

"He's been idle so long I can't say. Look here, Carruthers, make him do the drawings on approval; and if I were you I wouldn't give any money on account."

"Send him to me and I'll talk to him." Carruthers was just leaving the room when his friend called him back.

"I say, Carruthers, I'd better tell you, then you can't say I didn't. This chap has been in quod five years for forgery. His name's Maurice Hervey. I suppose he's out now on ticket-of-leave. He tells me he means to run straight for the future. Now you know all about it and can please yourself."

The consequence was that Carruthers, who held the same belief as him with "the harp of divers tones," resolved to see this man, and, moreover, to treat him as if he had no knowledge of his antecedents. He was glad to help any one back to the straight path.

Carruthers, who hated the bother of catering for himself, still lived at his hotel. He had taken an office in a quiet street some little way off. Here he spent the greater part of the day, writing his new book, correcting those delightful objects, the proofs of a first book, or thinking sadly of Beatrice's and his own lot. This office was on the first floor, and approached by a steepish, straight flight of uncarpeted stairs.

One morning he heard feet on the stairs—heard them stop on the little landing in front of the door which bore his name. Some one knocked, and Frank shouted "Come in." To his supreme astonishment in walked the man who had demanded Beatrice's address and so outraged old Whittaker's sense of dignity.

"What do you want?" asked Frank brusquely.

Hervey explained that Mr. Field had written to him and instructed him to call, so Carruthers knew that the man who was so anxious to find Beatrice was a forger, felon, and ticket-of-leave man. He raised his head and coldly scrutinised his visitor.

Hervey until that moment had not recognised him. He did so then, and knew that the recognition was mutual. All question of the original purpose which had brought about this meeting faded from the mind of each man. With each Beatrice was the one thought.

"Will you give the address I wanted when last we met?" asked Hervey eagerly.

"I will not," answered Carruthers shortly. He did not this time assert his inability to oblige his questioner, because he was unwilling to confess that Beatrice's present abode was a secret kept even from her own friends. He had also made up his mind that nothing should tempt him to ask this ex-convict a single question. An attempt to get at the truth through such a medium as this would be a degradation, an insult to the woman he loved.

His visitor took the blunt refusal very badly. The truth is, that Mr. Hervey's temper was not improving, or rather, his command of it was, from a sustained course of cigars and whisky and water, growing fitful and intermittent. Besides, Carruthers had a way with him which was particularly irritating to those who had the misfortune to quarrel with him. On a previous occasion Hervey had found it almost more than he could put up with. However, with the exception of slapping his hand on Frank's table, he controlled himself for the present.

"I must insist upon your telling me," he said; "I have to make an important business communication to Miss Clauson."

Carruthers smiled contemptuously. "Her trustees, the Messrs. Talbert of Oakbury, manage Miss Clauson's business, I believe. Or you might go to the family solicitor, whose name I will give you."

"My business is of a private nature. I demand this address. I have a right to ask it."

Carruthers shrugged his shoulders, elevated his eyebrows in true Talbert fashion, and again smiled that irritating smile.

"My good sir," he said, "cannot you understand that I absolutely refuse to gratify you? That a gentleman is not justified in giving every one who asks it a lady's address? Go to Sir Maingay Clauson, he is the proper person to apply to. As to rights, I am certainly within my own if I ask you to leave my room. No doubt you see that the business which gave me the pleasure of this visit cannot be carried through."

Hervey scowled, hesitated, and then walked out of the room. He was wise in so doing, as he might have said more than he intended; and a premature disclosure, indeed a disclosure at all, of the truth would entirely ruin his clouded prospects. As, from lack of politeness, or flurry of discomfiture, he left the door ajar, Carruthers rose and walked across the room to close it. Just then the door opened and the two men confronted each other on the threshold.

"If you write to Miss Clauson will you give her a message from me?" asked Hervey with forced civility.

"That depends exactly upon what the message may be."

"Will you tell her that I called on you and said the matter could now be easily arranged? There's no hafm in that."

"There seems none. When I write I'll give it."

"You'd better mention my real name. It's not Henry Morris—It's——"

"I am acquainted with your real name," said Frank with perfect nonchalance. Hervey grew very angry.

"Now I wonder who you may be," he said, "you who write to her. Perhaps you're sweet on each other, and look forward to a happy marriage." An incautious remark of the rogue's, yet one he could not refrain from making; nor could he refrain from eyeing Carruthers to see how the shot told. Hard as the effort was, Carruthers preserved his equanimity.

"Perhaps so," he said carelessly. "I can't, however, imagine it can be of the slightest interest to you." The scornful emphasis laid on the last word flicked Hervey like a whip.

"Perhaps so!" he echoed with his mocking laugh. "Ha, ha! do you think I'm a fool? Do you think you take me in with your studied ease? Don't I know you're dying to know who I am and all about me!"

"I know a good deal already," said Frank, in scathing tones. "If I felt any wish to know more I should apply at Scotland Yard, or wherever the proper office may be."

This taunt was more than even the most amiable ticket-

of-leave man could be expected to let pass. It finished Hervey entirely. He boiled over. With the violent expletive which invariably accompanies such an act he struck out full at the speaker.

This Carruthers was one of those deceptive men who at first glance give little promise of much strength. Yet if his frame was spare his shoulders were square, and all the weight he carried was bone and muscle. He may be summed up in the simple word wiry; and wiry men, as many a muscular-looking athlete knows to his cost, are not adversaries to be despised. He was far from being one of those marvellous creatures, usually officers in the Guards, who, in fiction at least, can crush up silver flagons, toss with one hand a sixteen stone ruffian over a ditch or a railing, but all the same he had his fair share of manly strength.

After parrying Hervey's blow, he simply jerked out his right arm to the very best of his knowledge and agility, throwing the whole weight of his body into it, and, in the language of what may now be called the revived prize-ring, "got well home."

These were the only two blows struck, and for this reason: Hervey, when he received Frank's blow was standing on the landing. He staggered back and went headlong down the steep stairs. It seemed as if his neck must be broken. However, he gathered himself up, groaned as in pain, shook his fist at the victor, swore, and then found his way out. Carruthers returned to his papers, but the reflections to which this interview gave rise made his afternoon a blank so far as literary work went.

Two days after this his friend Field called on him. "I say, Carruthers," he exclaimed, "you're a nice sort of young man. I sent a fellow who wanted a helping hand to you, and, hang me! you gave it to him with a vengeance. Helped him down, not up, though."

"He's been to you, has he?"

"Yes, he called to-day—in splints. Said you insulted him and chucked him over the stairs. Can't think how you did it. Doesn't seem like you either."

"I had the best of reasons."

"So I told him, but he won't believe me. You've broken his fibula or tibula, or his tib and fibula."

"His leg! I saw the blackguard walk away."

"Perhaps I'm not right about the names. His arm is broken. He vows he will have compensation. Go to law, etcetera."

"I don't think he will," said Carruthers significantly.

"Perhaps not, if your reasons were good ones. I don't ask them; but look here, old fellow. He's got no money, and won't be able to earn any for a while. Don't you think you ought to do something for him?"

"No, I don't," said Frank; "but I will. Keep the fellow away from me. But you can pay his doctor's bill and let him have a pound or two a week until he gets all right again."

Field laughed. "You'll find it a costly amusement breaking bones like this."

"My dear Field," said Frank, "if you knew all I know, you'd think it was cheap at the price in this particular case."

So by a strange irony of fate for some weeks Maurice Hervey was fed and doctored at the expense of Frank Carruthers.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"I CANNOT LIVE THIS LIFE!"

BEATRICE was at Munich. Munich, that city for its size, perhaps, the most regal capital in Europe. Munich, with its fair streets, noble statues, palaces old and new, libraries, museums, art galleries, and fast fleeting reputation for cheap living. Munich, which stands boldly out on a barren plain, no doubt feeling it has little which it need be ashamed to show to the world, except perhaps the vagaries of the eccentric being its king.

Beatrice never quite knew what induced her to choose the capital of Bavaria for her resting-place. Honestly, when she wrote from London to her uncles, she had not settled whither to wend her way. She might then just as likely have gone to Paris, Brussels, Vienna, or Berlin, as to Munich.

She fixed on Germany for various reasons. She had that feeling which, justly or unjustly, is common to most English people, that an unprotected and not unattractive woman is more free from annoyance in a German than in a French town. She also fancied she knew the German language better than she knew French. The scientific severity of the great Teutonic tongue had always charmed her. She had studied it deeply. She could read it in its classic forms with a certain amount of facility. She believed she could speak it well enough for the purposes of ordinary conversation. Alas! she was but one of the many who, when gutturals, compound words, and divisible participles are flying about like hail, find what a fraud is the boasted phonetic spelling, and what an age it takes to feel at one's

ease amid the elephantine gambols of the unwieldy language. Nevertheless, for the above and other reasons she chose Germany.

As the party had left Blacktown provided with no travelling indispensables, except the most important of all, money, many purchases had to be made in London. All were, however, made in time to catch the evening train to Dover, and that night Beatrice and her charges crossed the Channel. Then it seemed to her she was once more able to breathe. In London she had been haunted by the dread that Hervey would follow and find her. Once out of England she felt safe.

Be it understood that Beatrice was not flying from the shame which a revelation of her foolish marriage and subsequent act of deception would entail; although she would willingly have paid a large yearly sum, so long as her husband left her in peace and kept the secret. Gladly would she have made some arrangement which would spare her pride the mortification of her being known as the wife of a felon. Gladly would she have done all in her power to save her father, her uncles, and such friends as she had, the pain they must feel when all was revealed. Yet it was not on this account she fled. Her one aim was to save the child from the man who was his father.

She believed he could legally claim her boy. She knew he was villain enough to take him by force or fraud if the chance occurred. The moment Harry was in Hervey's hands she saw she would be at his mercy. She would be forced to submit to any conditions, howsoever exacting and humiliating, in order to regain possession of the one thing which was left her, the one thing she could love, or was permitted to love. Flight gave her a respite—gave her time for consideration. It was the simplest and easiest way out of the difficulty. So she decided upon it.

Once out of England they travelled by easy stages, and eventually reached their destination—Munich. The city on inspection seemed as suited as any other to Beatrice's need, so she hired a furnished flat, engaged a good-tempered, handy Bavarian servant, and settled down to that quiet, calm

life which she had in her letters to the Talberts described herself as living.

These letters were sent under cover to a friend of Mrs. Miller's, who posted them in London. As English stationery can be procured on the Continent as easily as everything else that is English, the letters conveyed no information which could be used to discover the retreat. Beatrice dreaded sending them; she feared that some unforeseen slip connected with them might disclose her abode. But it seemed so unkind not to let her uncles know she was alive and well. She did not write to her father. She fancied her proceedings would not trouble him much, and felt sure that any letter sent to him would run the gauntlet of Lady Clauson's unkind comments. She trusted to Horace and Herbert to let him know all that they knew.

Beatrice made few, if any, chance acquaintances. Some people never do. Just as there are men whom other men never think of asking for a cigar-light, so are there women to whom other women do not make the first advances. Beatrice, with her reserved but polite manner, classical features, and distinguished bearing, no doubt conveyed the idea that she was a state not to be encroached upon without the passport of an introduction.

So for society she had her boy and her faithful slave, Mrs. Miller.

However much a mother may love her child, she is not blamed if she finds that his constant company does not give all the pleasure the world can give. However faithful and intelligent a servant may be, the mistress may with a clear conscience look beyond her for a companion.

So Beatrice's life grew once more dismal and colourless. So much so, that under its present conditions the late life at Hazlewood House, when contrasted with it, seemed a wild round of variety and dissipation.

She had her books and her music, but she had no one with whom to discuss the books, no one to listen to her music. She took lessons in painting from one of the thousand artists in the great art-centre, Munich, but this was but an aid to kill time, and unbroken with any

ambitious aim. She had her thoughts. These she shunned as much as possible. It seemed to her that there was nothing upon which she could look back with pleasure, nothing to which she could look forward with hope. She often recalled Carruthers's assertion that, in spite of manner, she must have some dream of happiness, and she sighed as she thought that now less than ever did life show any joy of which she even dared to dream.

Beatrice was sitting one afternoon in the room she called her studio. She was alone and in deep thought. She had just finished one of her periodical letters to her uncles. It was lying near her, directed but not sealed. Beatrice was wrestling with the temptation of sending a message to Frank. She could not bear to picture him thinking her cold and heartless. Should she add a line to her letter? Should she even write him a letter? But what could she say to him? Nothing, absolutely nothing! Besides, provided he had not yet learnt the truth, the most conventional message from her would raise hopes never to be realised. Poor Frank! why did he learn to love her? Why did she love him? No, not that! She was happy that she loved him; that she had found the power of loving and trusting still hers. Yes, hopeless as such love was, she rejoiced that she could love such a man as Frank. But no word, no message must be sent.

"It is a part of the price I must pay for my folly," she said as she sealed her letter. Her eyes were full of tears as she did so. Mrs. Miller entered and saw her emotion.

"My sweet, my dear," she said; "what is it? There is no fresh trouble?"

"None, the old one is enough," said Beatrice. Mrs. Miller looked at her solicitously.

"You are thinking of the man who loves you?" she said soothingly.

"Yes," said Beatrice with recovered composure. "Yes, I am thinking that I may have wrecked his life as well as my own."

"No, no, my poor dear. It will come right. You will be happy—he will be happy."

Beatrice smiled a hopeless smile.

"It will be—it is written," continued Mrs. Miller. "Nothing can change it. God's arm is not shortened. His purpose——"

Beatrice checked her sternly. Since Sarah's outbreak in the train all signs of fanaticism had been at once repressed by Beatrice. "My letter is ready," she said; "take it and direct it to your friend. There are envelopes."

Sarah glanced at her mistress, who was once more deep in thought. She took two envelopes and also a stray half-sheet of note-paper. Then she went into another room, and hastily writing a few words on the paper placed it in an envelope, addressed it, and inclosed it, with Beatrice's letter, in the packet which was to go to her friend in London.

Beatrice resumed her painful train of thought. Writing home had made her feel utterly wretched. It was now May; nearly five months had she been living this dreary life, and keeping every one in ignorance as to where she was. How much longer must it go on? She could, of course, leave Munich whenever she thought fit, but every other place would be just as dreary to her. Locality matters little when a sea of trouble surrounds one. Let a man count up his happiest days, and he will find that the place in which he spent them contributed not much to their happiness. Beatrice, who was now somewhere about twenty-three, had most certainly a right to expect some happy days in this world.

She began to ask herself the questions which had recently been framing themselves in her mind. Had she after all acted in the wisest way? Was her life to be quite marred by that one act of folly? If she turned and firmly grasped her nettle, would the sting be fatal, or even more than she could bear? She was, like most of us, a blending of contradictions. She was wise and foolish; brave and timid; proud and humble, as pressure of circumstances forced her to be. She began to loathe this hiding, this shrinking into corners. Could she nerve herself to come forth and face the worst?

What was the worst? The worst was her dread of losing

her child. What if she wrote to Horace and Herbert and told them everything, begged them to forgive the harmless deceit which she had practised ; entreated them to see this man and make such terms as they could ? Might she not, when they had assured her security and peace, face such scorn as the world would throw her ?

Then she began to wonder if Hervey had revealed the truth ? If her father, Lady Clauson—here she shuddered—her uncles knew that she was this man's wife. Although she had just been resolving to make it known to them, the thought of their being in possession of the knowledge was horrible to her. Yet all this while they might have known it—might have heard it from Hervey's lips. This thought half maddened her. She must learn if it was so.

She thought regretfully of that peaceful life at Hazlewood House. Horace and Herbert's little womanish ways seemed part and parcel of the pleasant home. She thought of old Whittaker, of William Giles, of the other servants. She thought, with a pang of deeper regret, of Sylvanus Mordle, who had also found in her the woman he could love. She even thought of young Purton's well-meant but unsophisticated advances. Then, of course, she thought of Carruthers—thought of him more than of all.

And Frank ? Did Frank know, and if so, what did he think of her ? Or, when he knew, what would he think of her ? Did he, would he, curse her very memory ? Ah, so far as her love was concerned there could be no hope for better days !

At this juncture Beatrice broke down, just as she had broken down when she refused Frank's love. She laid her head on the table and sobbed bitterly. Sarah returning from posting her letter found her so, and of course knelt beside her, cried with her, and soothed her.

"I cannot live this life !" sobbed Beatrice. "I cannot live it longer !"

"My pretty dear ! my poor darling !" said the woman, her hard features transfigured by pity, and smoothing the girl's brown hair as a mother might have done.

"I can bear it no longer," said Beatrice. "I will write

and tell them all. Tell them how I have been wronged—how I have wronged them. No," she exclaimed, starting to her feet, "I cannot do it. There must be other means. He is mercenary. Oh, I will give him all if he will keep silent and leave me in peace—leave me and the boy in peace."

"Let me go to England and see him," said Sarah.

"You!" Beatrice started at the idea.

"Yes. Let me go. He is a wicked man, but he can do me no harm. Oh, my dear mistress, let me go. I can hear what he wants—make him promise and put that down in writing. Let me do this for you, my dear. By the love I bear you I ask it."

"How could you find him?"

"He is sure to be in London. If not, there's those who can tell me where to find him. Say I may go. Let me go to-day—to-morrow."

Beatrice mused. After all, the suggestion did not seem so absurd. Sarah was by no means a fool. She could travel to England alone perfectly well. She could hear what this man asked now. Why should she not let her go?

Mrs. Miller seemed on thorns of suspense. "Say I may go," she whispered.

"I will think. I will tell you by and by. Send my boy to me, I will think with him in my arms."

So the "shorn lamb," as he was now called, came to his mother, and all the afternoon Beatrice considered Mrs. Miller's proposal. The more she considered the more inclined she felt to give it her countenance.

In the evening she told her she might go. She gave her many instructions which were not to be exceeded. She was to find Hervey and hear his demands. She was to be firm, and above all have it clearly understood that he must sign a deed of separation, in which he relinquished all claim to the boy. Mrs. Miller nodded grimly. She was not likely to err on the side of mercy.

"Take plenty of money," said Beatrice. "Give him money if he asks for it. Make him understand that I have not concealed myself to save my money. That he can always have."

So it was arranged. Fully one-half of that night was spent by Mrs. Miller on her knees. She was alone—Harry slept with his mother as often as with his nurse—so she could offer up her wild prayers without interruption. If ever a fanatic wrestled with the Supreme Being in prayer, it was Sarah Miller that night. For what did she pray? Perhaps it is as well not to ask, but to be contented with the assurance that she prayed for Beatrice's happiness.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MADONNA DI TEMPI.

BEATRICE's letter, after having been perused and commented upon by the Talberts, was sent on to Frank Carruthers. A note from Herbert was inclosed with it. "You will see"—he wrote—"that this letter is as unsatisfactory as its predecessors. It gives us absolutely no information as to where she is or why she left us. Now that we are assured of her being well, and, we suppose, safe, our feeling about her prolonged and unexplained absence is more than regret—it is in fact serious annoyance. We find it quite a strain to answer inquiries about her without contradicting one another."

Naturally the envelope which bore Herbert's handwriting was the first opened by Carruthers, and of course he read Beatrice's letter before he read Herbert's. He searched the former in vain for his own name, little thinking how the writer had sat for a long time before she could bring herself to seal her letter without sending him a crumb of comfort. He then read Herbert's commentary and smiled faintly as he drew a ludicrous picture of Horace and Herbert making counter-statements to their friends. He mused a while, holding Beatrice's letter in his hand. Her fingers had touched that sheet of paper; so he actually pressed it to his lips, and in doing so caught a faint lingering odour of what he remembered was her favourite perfume. It was clear that Mr. Carruthers's disease was as rampant as ever.

By and by he turned to see what else Fate had brought him. Nowadays Fate shoots many of her arrows from the

General Post Office. Carruthers found among other letters one addressed in a woman's handwriting. It had been sent to Oxford and at Oxford redirected to London. He opened it carelessly and found it contained a half-sheet of note-paper, on which was written "Remember your promise. Wait—oh be patient and wait!"

Carruthers threw it aside with a bitter smile. He well knew who was the writer. Wait! What was there to wait for? However, the sight of those words brought back the memory of that strange nocturnal visit; of the woman's earnest, even impassioned appeal to him, to "wait five, ten, twenty years for the one he loved." Why should she write now and repeat the appeal? She who knew everything; she who had accompanied Beatrice and who was probably with her now.

He could not get the memory of that strange creature with her dreary belief, yet unswerving faith as to his own future, from his mind. At the time the woman's earnestness had impressed him more than he cared to confess. Superstition is a quality to the possession of which no man of our time is willing to own, not even to himself. Yet nine men out of ten are superstitious.

Carruthers told himself that such hope as he had gathered from Mrs. Miller's words was simply gathered because he believed her to be in Beatrice's confidence. Here it was wrong. It was the woman's broad but absolute assertion, uttered with the passionate inspiration of a prophetess of old, that happiness in this world awaited him and Beatrice, which had been of aid to him in his trouble. If faith can move stubborn mountains, why not a heart which is willing enough to move in a particular direction?

And now this woman repeated her message, and, as Carruthers read the letter, told him his case was no more hopeless than it was months ago.

He took the note which he had crumpled up and tossed away; he spread it out and read it again. He found, moreover, that it was written on paper similar to that used by Beatrice, and upon turning it over he saw on the back a few words in pencil. They were written so faintly that

he had to carry the note to a strong light in order to decipher them.

The words were "*Madonna di Tempi*," and to the best of his belief, as experts say when giving evidence, the handwriting was Beatrice's.

What did the words mean, and how far would they aid him in finding Beatrice? He soon settled in his mind that *Madonna di Tempi* must be the name of a picture. But what picture? Where was it to be found?

Of course it did not follow that supposing he could ascertain all about this picture, which might or might not be a world-famed one, that he would find Beatrice near it. Nevertheless the clue was worth following. He would have followed a finer clue than this to the end of the world on the chance of its leading him to Beatrice. So he at once set about the task of getting information, if information could be got, respecting a picture called the *Madonna di Tempi*. He hoped, but his hopes were not very strong. Indeed, he could not help comparing his case to that of the fair Saracen's, who found her lover by the aid of two words. Yet she was better off than he was. She at least had the name of a place for one of her talismanic words. He had the name of what he supposed to be a picture; nothing more.

Mr. Carruthers was not one of the inner circle of art worshippers. His sallet, his *sturm und drang*, his emotional days, were well over before the era of blue and white china. He had no rhapsodies, written or spoken, to arise hereafter and prick his conscience. He had not bowed his knee to the intense, nor sacrificed on the altar of the incomprehensible. He was fond of pictures as pictures, and was bold enough to say he liked what he did like, and that he disliked what he did dislike. Hence it will be at once seen that his opinion was worth nothing to any one except himself.

Having found the knowledge not indispensable, he could not, like many men, check off on his fingers the principal productions of the grand old masters, and name the spot of earth on which each one could be found. But like the man who, when challenged to fight, replied, "I can't fight

myself, but I have a little friend who can," and forthwith struck down his challenger with a short, stout poker, Mr. Carruthers, if he did not know these things himself, had a friend who knew.

This friend was a Mr. Burnett, a recognised art authority. Now it is an accepted truth that an art authority is born, not made; at least no one has yet discovered the method of manufacture. He steals upon the world full grown, the great mother Art's exponent. He is recognised. He is kind and benignant. He takes our hands and guides us, shows us what to praise and what to blame. We are grateful, and, if we are rich, regulate our purchases according to his word.

Frank found Mr. Burnett at his rooms writing—critiques on the recently opened exhibitions most likely. Burnett was a tall man, at least six feet high. He was portly, and filled his round-backed study chair most thoroughly. His face was round and cleanly shaved. He was slightly bald. His eyes were blue and looked at you in a way which gave promise of humour. Taking him altogether he was the last man whom, judging by his writings and renown, you would have expected to be Mr. Burnett, and a certain artist who, objecting to some of his views, spoke of him as an "emaciated apostle of æstheticism," could not have enjoyed his personal acquaintance.

"Why, Carruthers!" he said, in a soft but rich voice. "So it is. I haven't seen you for an age. Sit down, my dear fellow. Have a smoke?"

He pushed across the cigar box. The cigar box, or its substitute the cigarette box, is in the social transactions of modern life rapidly taking the place once filled by the snuff box of our respected ancestors.

"Got a book coming out," continued Burnett. "Your publisher told me about it. They expect great things of it. Don't know that you ought to build on that. Oh yes, my dear Carruthers"—Frank was about to speak—"of course I'll do anything I can for you. I am afraid it won't be much. But I think it's better to let every tub stand on its own bottom. If this thing be of——"

Here Carruthers managed to slip in a word. "I didn't know I'd asked you to do anything."

"But you're going to. A man who turns up after a long absence always comes to ask for something. I was only anticipating your request. I always consent beforehand when I can. Every one has to consent to do what he's asked. It shows much greater delicacy to forestall the demand."

"At any rate I didn't come to talk about my book."

"Impossible, my dear Carruthers! A first book, and not want to talk about it! Is modesty not yet extinct? Do talk about it—it's unnatural not to do so."

"Confound it!" said Carruthers. "Will you listen? I came to ask——"

"I knew you came to ask something; my grief is that I did not guess what."

"You know a great deal about pictures, don't you?" said Carruthers, not noticing the interruption.

Burnett wheeled round and looked at his friend. His eyes twinkled. "Ah, my dear Carruthers, there you have me. That is a question I ask myself day and night. Do I know a great deal about pictures? In confidence, my life would be happier if I could answer that question. My good fellow, the spectre, the Frankenstein that haunts my existence, is the dread that some day I shall laud a work to the skies and find too late, too late, that it is a bad copy. This, Carruthers, is an anxiety you will be ever spared. Answer your own question for me and you will make me a happier man."

Frank laughed. "Well, you're supposed to know a great deal."

"That is a much better way of putting it. I can answer that without outraging modesty. Supposing then that I am supposed to know—what follows?"

"I want to——"

"My dear Carruthers, my question was one of those interpolated phrases which an orator uses for the purpose of answering himself. I know perfectly well what you want. You have bought in a shop in some back slum, or, it may

be, at a sale, a piece of old canvas or copper covered with certain pigments. You have bought it for a song. You have taken it home, looked at it in every light; you have wetted your fingers and rubbed them over portions of your purchase, and have found hidden beauties. You have looked through a magnifying glass and tried to find a signature. Now don't interrupt me, my dear fellow, I know the whole process. Belief as to the enormous value of your purchase has grown upon you, but you are not quite satisfied, so you have come to show it to me, and at this moment a cab is standing at my door with your picture in it. Don't bother to carry it up. If you insist upon my looking at it just go down and hold it up; I'll look out of window."

"I didn't come in a cab," said Carruthers.

"Ah, then it's too large to bring to me. So much the worse for you, Carruthers. It's in your rooms of course, resting on a chair, in a strong light. Oh yes, I'll look round some morning. You generally smoke good cigars and I suppose keep a drink handy. Don't apologise for troubling me. It will be no trouble. But about the picture; put it in your bedroom with its face to the wall. I needn't look at it. I can give you my opinion without seeing it. I assure you it is not genuine, my dear Carruthers—they never are."

"As I have not bought any picture——" began Carruthers.

"Oh, it's one you're going to buy, is it? Do you know, my dear Carruthers, I should be careful if I were you. I wouldn't go beyond five pounds unless it is a Titian, a Guido, a Raphael, or a Murillo. Then you might go to seven. Seven pounds is a nice limit for a picture buyer. I know a man who got together a charming gallery of old masters on a seven pound limit. Funny thing too, he had several genuine works in it."

"Lucky man!" said Frank, who began to see that he must let his friend go to the length of his tether. Mr. Burnett was not a rapid speaker but a continuous and a sustained one. He was one of those men whose words flow out so softly, so richly, and so pleasantly that it seems sacrilege to stop them.

"I don't see the luck, my dear Carruthers. His pictures cost him seven pounds apiece and would no doubt sell for seven pounds apiece. Of course it never occurred to you that a picture to fetch money must be more than genuine. It must have a pedigree. A picture without a pedigree is as worthless as a princess without one. A picture with a pedigree sells for Heaven knows what, although it isn't genuine. My dear fellow, I know a man who gave twenty-two thousand pounds for a couple of pictures. They were bought abroad for six thousand, sent over in a special steamer. My friend heard about them, and, being afraid some one would forestall him, went down to Dover to meet them. He gave a cheque for the money without even unscrewing the cases. What do you think of that?"

"The dealer guaranteed the pictures, I suppose?"

"Guaranteed! How simple you are, Carruthers! Who can guarantee a picture except the artist who painted it? No, he guaranteed that the cases contained two pictures which had hung in a nobleman's residence in a certain place, and which had formerly hung in another place, and which had belonged to so and so, and which were the two identical pictures mentioned by Horace Walpole or somebody else, as two of the finest examples of a certain artist, and so back and back. There was an unbroken pedigree. Well, my dear Carruthers, I was present when my friend opened the cases. That was because I knew the pictures and could assure him he had the right ones. I had, of course, seen them before, and when first I saw them I had the advantage of the reputed artist—he never saw them."

"You told your friend so, of course."

"Certainly not. Who am I to dispute the verdict of those who went before me? The pictures were established, my dear fellow. Besides my friend had a very good bargain. If his collection is ever sold they will fetch thirty thousand. But I'd stick to the seven pound limit if I were you. And now about this picture you want to buy?"

"I haven't the slightest intention of buying any picture."

"My dear Carruthers! I hope I haven't deterred you. I hope I have not nipped the incipient bud of art love."

"I say, Burnett," said Frank, growing desperate. "If you'd only condescend to listen——"

"Listen!" said Burnett with mock reproach, "my dear fellow, haven't I listened to every word you have said. Haven't I tried to counsel you to the best of my ability? Well, go on!"

"Do you know any picture called the *Madonna di Tempi*?" asked Carruthers hastily, and happy to get the question out at last.

"A picture called the *Madonna di Tempi*," echoed Burnett. "That's a good broad order, Carruthers. Now, who may that picture be by? An artist's name might aid my memory."

"If I knew the artist's name I shouldn't come bothering you. I should get my information first hand from Pilkington's dictionary or what book you use."

"No doubt you could. Any one can find information if he knows where to look for it. On that shelf you will find catalogues of all the European galleries. You can take them and look them through. About a week's employment I should say."

"I can't spare the time," said Frank. "If you can't, tell me; I will go and ask some one else. Only I thought you knew every picture in Europe."

Burnett's eyes twinkled. He laid his hand on Frank's arm. "My dear Carruthers," he said, "let me entreat you for your own sake not to go rushing about and proclaiming your ignorance of art matters. Let that secret be deposited with me alone. I will guard it reverently."

"Tell me where the picture is," said Frank.

Burnett stretched out his arm and took a book off a shelf. He opened it and read as follows:—

"Both in tone and execution this beautiful work is closely allied to the celebrated *Madonna* of the House of Orleans. The colours are laid on thinly with a somewhat fuller impasto in the whitish light. It is impossible to conceive a more glossy finish united to more subtle modelling, or greater purity of colours of the richest tinge and most dazzling brightness. It is characterised by plump

form, soft blending and spare impaste of flesh, bathed in vapour, and made transparent by delicate glazes. It is a true touch of nature which makes the mother accompany the embrace with a look of tender affection, while the child receives the caress more mechanically and gazes straight out of the picture?"

"There, my dear Carruthers, do you recognise it? Is that your picture?"

Frank fell into the humour. "It must be," he said gravely. "The plump form, the spare impaste, the bath of vapour. There cannot be two such. But set my doubts at rest."

"Ah, yes. I see it is called the *Madonna di Tempi*. Painted by Raphael. You have heard of Raphael, Carruthers?"

"Where is it?" asked Frank quickly.

"It is in the Old Pinakothek."

"In the what?"

"My dear Carruthers, how ignorant you are. I thought you studied Greek at Oxford—Pinakothek is derived from a Greek word——"

"I know all that, but where is it?"

"My dear Carruthers, you asked me what, not where. I was answering your question."

"But where is it!"

"Your ignorance is deplorable. The Old Pinakothek is in Munich. Munich, you may know, is the capital of——"

Frank jumped up, feeling he had been tormented long enough. "Thank you," he said, "I am so much obliged."

"Not going, Carruthers! Oh, sit down and have a chat. Tell me all about your book. You must be dying to tell me all."

"No, I'm not. I must go now. Good-bye."

"But where are you going?"

"The words you read have fired me. I am going to Munich to see the *Madonna di Tempi*." And before Mr. Burnett could get out another question Carruthers was gone.

The smallest slips ruin the most cleverly devised schemes.

The omission or the addition on a bill of exchange of a simple mark called a "tick," sent Messrs. Bidwell and Co. into retirement at the country's expense, instead of enjoying the fat of a foreign land at the cost of the old lady of Threadneedle Street. An act of Beatrice's, that of pencilling down in an idle moment the title of a picture which had struck her fancy, brought Mr. Carruthers in hot haste to her hiding-place. Fate is turned by a feather!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

CARRUTHERS reached Munich late at night. He went straight to that comfortable hotel the "Four Seasons," and, feeling that the hour was too late to begin his researches, supped and went to bed. In spite of his excitement at the thought of being in the same town as Beatrice, he slept soundly. Man is but mortal, and after travelling as fast as is possible from London to Munich, it takes a great deal to spoil a night's rest. So in the morning Carruthers arose refreshed and eager to begin the quest.

But how to begin it? He was not even sure that its object was in Munich. Because she had written down the name of a picture it did not follow she was near that work of art. She might only have paid Munich a flying visit—might now be miles and miles away. He grew very despondent as he realised the slender, fragile nature of the clue which he had so impetuously taken up and followed. Nevertheless, he vowed he would not leave Munich until he felt sure it did not harbour the fugitives. :

He stepped through the swinging doors of his hotel, and stood in the broad Maximilians-Strasse. He hesitated, uncertain what to do, which way to turn. So far as he could see, his only chance of finding Beatrice was meeting her in the public streets; his only plan was to walk about those streets until he met her. At any rate, he would do nothing but this for the next few days. If unsuccessful, he would then think whether he could apply to such persons as might be able to tell him what strangers were living in Munich.

He turned to the right, went across the Platz, and into

the fair Ludwig-Strasse. He walked on, with palaces on either hand, until he came to the gate of victory. Pre-occupied as Mr. Carruthers was, the number of magnificent buildings he passed greatly impressed him. However, he deferred his admiration until happier times.

A kind of superstition made him think it well to see the picture which had brought him so far. He inquired the way to the Old Pinakothek, and, upon arriving there, sought for and found the *Madonna di Tempi*. He stood for a long time contemplating it, not because he so much admired it as in the hope that fate might bring Beatrice to his side. She did not come, so he bade the *Madonna* adieu, and, after having run quickly through the large rooms and cabinets in the hope of encountering Beatrice, he left the building wishing that the living masterpiece he sought was as easy to find as that of the dead artist.

Keeping to what seemed the principal and most populous streets, he found himself once more in front of his hotel. He started off in an opposite direction, went down the broad Maximilians-Strasse. More palaces, more statues, but no Beatrice. At last he stood on the stone bridge which spans the shallow but rapid Isar. He stopped and looked at the curious artificial bed of smooth planks over which the river runs; and then he looked down into the little triangular pleasure-garden which lies between the two arms of the stream.

In the garden, on one of the seats, intently engaged with a book, sat Beatrice. Her little boy was playing near her. It needed not the sight of the boy to assure Carruthers he was not mistaken. Like all lovers, he told himself he would have known that graceful head, that perfect form, at least a mile away. Yes, there was Beatrice! The *Madonna* had not led him astray. Had Carruthers been a Roman Catholic he might have shown his gratitude by the expenditure of pounds and pounds of wax candles.

He stood for some time watching Beatrice. Now that he had found her, he trembled at his own act. He trembled at the thought of what he had to say to her, what she had to say to him. He comforted himself by the

assurance that he had only sought her, broken through her concealment, for the sake of giving, or at least offering, such help as he could give.

After this he walked slowly down to the garden and stood in front of her. She raised her eyes and knew him. Her book fell to the ground. She sprang to her feet and uttered a little cry—a cry that sounded very sweet to Mr. Carruthers, as it was unmistakably one of pleasure. At the unexpected appearance of the man she loved, for a moment there was no thought in her heart save that of joy. She stretched out her hands. “Frank! Frank!” she cried. “You here?”

He took her hands in his and, regardless of bystanders, gazed into her gray eyes. For a moment he could not speak. The sight of Beatrice, the touch of her hand, sent the blood rushing through his veins. Days, weeks, months he had pictured this meeting, and now it had come to pass!

She was fairer than ever—fairer than ever! The pure classical features seemed even more perfect, the clear pale face more beautiful, the dark gray eyes more wonderful than of old. And, as she had given that little cry of joy, something had leapt into her eyes which Carruthers had never before seen there, or never before seen so clearly and undisguisedly. The surprise of seeing him had swept away caution, and for the space of two seconds Frank was able to read the very secret of her soul.

No wonder he held her hands and gazed silently in her face. What had he to say—What could he say? The certainty that she loved him made his task no easier—the task of telling her that he knew her secret, or at least a great part of it—the task of asking her to confide in him and let him help her. So he remained silent until she gently drew her hands from his.

The light had faded from Beatrice’s face. She also after a moment of forgetfulness was coming back to her own world and its troubles. Her eyes dropped and her face clouded.

“How did you find me?” she asked in troubled tones.

"By a strange chance. I will tell you how some day."

"Tell me now."

Frank shook his head. "Not now," he said. "Let it suffice that I have found you."

"But," said Beatrice with agitation, "do others know—can others find me? If you learnt it why not another?"

He saw the display of fear, and hastened to reassure her. "No one save myself can learn it in the same way. Your retreat is safe."

She sighed her relief. There was an awkward pause. Frank was the first to break it.

"Beatrice," he said, "I have come a long way to see you. I have much to say—you may have much to say to me. Can we go to some place where we can talk?"

"Yes, we can go to my home." Beatrice called her boy, and Frank, glad of anything to break the awkwardness of the moment, greeted the little fellow and made friends with him to such purpose that he insisted upon Mr. Carruthers holding his chubby hand and walking with him.

"What a pity to cut that bright hair!" said Frank to Beatrice.

"It was more than pity—it was cruel, but it was cruel necessity," she said sadly.

Beatrice led the way to the house in which she lived. She walked with her head bent, and as one in deep thought. She could not make up her mind whether to be glad or sorry at Frank's coming. She saw, however, that it put an end to her present mode of life. That it meant confession, revealing of everything. That it meant return to England and to such friends as would still be her friends. That if it meant shame and sorrow, it also meant safety and immunity from persecution. She began to regret that she had yielded to Sarah's wish to go to England and see Hervey. But that was not of much consequence. She felt sure that as soon as Carruthers learnt her history her affairs would pass into hands more competent to deal with them than the hands of two weak women. So on the whole her feelings were those of relief.

And yet for some, for one reason, Frank was the last person she would have chosen to whom to reveal her secrets. She shrank from having to show the man she loved that her life for years had been one of deceit. Now that the deceit had to be confessed to him, it seemed to lose all the innocent nature which she had hitherto flattered herself it possessed. In short, if such a thing can be imagined, Beatrice felt, as Carruthers once felt her to be, as an idol would feel when just upon the point of being hurled down from its pedestal.

Carruthers, who had his own thoughts to trouble him, and to whom it seemed that any conventional remarks would at the present juncture be mockery, respected her meditations, so that, save for the lisping prattle of the boy, silence reigned until Beatrice found herself in her room with Frank sitting near her. It struck her as so strange that he of all others should be here, that even now she wondered if she was dreaming. She shunned his eyes, fearing to read reproach in them.

"How are they all at home?" she asked. "How are my uncles, and dear old Hazlewood?" Her eyes filled with tears. Her emotion did not escape Carruthers.

"They are all well," he said. "I heard from Herbert a few days ago. He sent me your letter."

"Will they ever forgive me?" said Beatrice. "Will they ever speak to me again?"

"I hope so," said Frank gravely. "They were, of course, much vexed and upset."

Beatrice glanced at him nervously. Even if he had but held out a hope of forgiveness—and he loved her. She wished he had not come to Munich.

"Do they know my reason for leaving England?" she asked timidly.

"No. They have hazarded many guesses, but not one has been near the truth."

She started at his answer. The truth? Did he know the truth? If so, how had he learnt it?

"Do you know why I left?" she asked.

A look of pain settled on Carruthers's face. "Yes," he

said softly. "Chance has given me your story. But to me—only to me."

"Do you know all—all that I have done, all that I have suffered?"

He rose. There was strange agitation in his manner and voice. "All!" he exclaimed. "Beatrice! Beatrice! how can I find words to tell you what I know? Beatrice, did I not just now hear that child call you mother?"

"Yes, he is my son," she said calmly.

"All!" continued Carruthers excitedly. "Need I know all? Need I be racked by hearing the one I love tell me all? Need I pain her by forcing her to hear me? Have I not heard enough? Why should I seek to know more?"

"Let me tell you my story, Frank," she said beseechingly.

"No!" He spoke in that imperious tone which she had once before, in a slighter degree, noticed. "No! Listen to me. Beatrice, believe me, I have longed to find you. I have sighed for this moment. If I have surprised your secrets it was not for my own ends. Beatrice, when chance showed me where you were, I came to you with but one object. This morning—even when, at last, I saw you, I had but one thought. It was to come to you, to say I have sought you because you are in distress, because you want help. Such help as I can give is yours. Without question, without the hope of reward, it is yours."

Again she strove to interrupt him. He checked her.

"Listen! I have more, much, more, to say. I have seen you again," his voice changed to one of supreme tenderness, "I have held your hands. I have looked into your face—the same sweet face of my dreams. Beatrice, all is changed with me," he knelt beside her and took her hands. "If once I wished to know all, now I say, tell me nothing. What is the past to me? Hide it away, forget it, scorn it. Our life begins to-day. I love you. Bend down and tell me you will be my wife."

She forcibly drew her hands from his, covered her eyes, and sobbed.

"You love me," he went on passionately. "Is it for

my sake you will not do this thing? Look at me—read in my eyes what my heart desires—know that you have the power of making or marring a man's life. Beatrice! My love, my only love, answer me!"

Once more he tried to take her hands. She tore them away with a cry of anguish, and her tearful eyes rested on his troubled, upturned face.

"Frank," she said, "you are killing me. Spare me and let me speak!"

He waited in anxious silence until her sobs died away and sustained speech was a possibility.

"Frank, Frank!" she said. "You have been misled. You have heard but half the truth. You love me, yet dare to think that if what you have heard is true I would be your wife. I cannot blame you for believing. I have no right to blame. My actions have helped that belief. Yet in believing it, you, Frank, have given me the sharpest pain of all that I have known."

Carruthers bent his head and prayed she would forgive him.

"I have nothing to forgive. From whom did you think I fled—from what danger? Frank, I fled from the man who is my husband—the man who more than five years ago took advantage of a girl's folly, married her and made her life a misery."

Carruthers rose from his knees. His face was white as a sheet. He was the picture of despair. A legion of Mrs. Millers would not now have caused hope to throw up the tiniest shoot. Her husband! The room seemed to swim around him.

When he recovered himself he saw Beatrice with the tears falling down her cheeks. The sight was a bitter reproach to him. How had he kept his vow? Instead of giving her comfort and aid he was but adding to her trouble. Moreover, a keen sense of shame came home to him. Instead of joy he had felt fresh misery when Beatrice's words told him that her secret was not one of such nature as he had been led to believe. That his first thought upon hearing the truth should have been one of sorrow showed

him that he had reached a depth of selfishness and degradation which no love could excuse or condone. He blushed for himself, and for the sake of his manhood strove until he regained composure. There was a strange calm on his face when, once more, he drew near Beatrice.

"Tell me all," he said in a quiet voice. "No, don't fear for me." She glanced at him inquiringly. "Tell me all, I can bear it. I can help you."

She told him all. Told him without self-excuse, without even exaggerating her husband's sins against the world and against her. She told him without claiming mercy on account of what she had suffered; but there was a pathos in her voice, an utter hopelessness in her manner, which told her listener more than words could have told. His heart ached as he thought of her; his blood boiled as he thought of the villain who had wrought this misery.

He heard her to the very end in silence. Throughout her tale she had not spoken of her husband by any name; but from the first Carruthers guessed who he was. As she finished speaking he turned his pale face to her. "The man's name is Hervey," he said.

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"I have seen him twice." As he spoke Carruthers involuntarily clenched his hands. There was a kind of savage satisfaction in thinking under what conditions he last saw the rogue. He wished he had struck even harder. He frowned and his mouth grew hard and stern. Beatrice saw the facial change.

"Do you blame me too much to forgive me, Frank?" she asked anxiously. He looked at her with eyes as soft and tender as a woman's.

"Blame you? Who am I to blame you? What have I to forgive? You have all my pity—all my sympathy. Again I offer you such help as I can give—such help as a brother can give a sister. You will take this from me, Beatrice?"

She placed her hand in his. "Yes, I will take it. It is more than I deserve. Ah, me! why should my trouble enter into your life?"

His fingers tightened on hers. His eyes sought hers "Beatrice," he said, "I did not live until I knew you. You have a right to claim all I can give. Yet there is something I must ask—something I must know. You have told me much—will you tell me all?"

"I have told you all."

"No, not all. Beatrice, life promises to be but a sorry affair for me. Let me have such cold consolation as it can give. Beatrice, let me hear you say with your own lips that had things been otherwise you could have loved me—would have been my wife."

She met his eyes bravely. "Yes, Frank," she said softly. "I will say that. I will say more. I love you now. Ah, Frank, reproach me, blame me, when I tell you that although I knew it meant unhappiness for you it was a sweet moment to me when first I knew that you loved me."

After this avowal there was silence for a minute. Then Carruthers leaned forward. "Beatrice, my love," he said hoarsely, "kiss me once. I only ask it once."

She flushed to the roots of her hair, yet she made no resistance. Carruthers drew her to him and for the first, and, for all he knew, the last time their lips met. He took, she gave, the one kiss. When it was over Carruthers released her from his embrace, and the two drew apart.

Here, no doubt, Mr. Carruthers will sink immensely in public esteem. He acted as a hero is never supposed to act, or at least in fiction. He lost an opportunity. Every one who has studied the nature of true love as depicted by the modern passionate writers and skilled analysts of the human heart, must feel that Mr. Carruthers should have then and there clasped Beatrice to his heart and have sworn that love overruled everything. He should have followed that one modest kiss by thousands. He should have said, "What is the marriage tie when two souls are in such ecstatic communion as yours and mine?" He should have said, "There are other lands. Lands where no one knows us, where life may be a perpetual dream of love. Let us fly there and be blessed." In the mad whirl of his passion such scruples as she, for appearance' sake,

urged should have been swept away, and, married or unmarried, he should have borne her off, his for ever and ever! Yes, he lost such an opportunity that his conduct must be apologised for!

He did none of these wild, passionate things, simply because he was an English gentleman, who wished the woman he loved to be his wife and the lawful mother of his children. True, that his love had carried him away sufficiently to make him willing to blot out an imaginary past. It was great enough to raise and restore the woman he loved, but it was not great enough, or, shall we say, too great, to dream of degrading her!

CHAPTER XXXI.

A WOMAN WITH A MISSION.

INSPIRATION, as a rule, soars above the pettiness of detail, and of all inspiration that one whose wings are worked by religion flies the highest and freest from trammels of custom and caution. A man or a woman inspired with an ethical mission to humanity feels fully convinced that, provided the eyes are kept steadfastly on the glorious result, the brambles which have for ages choked the path leading to the great goal will in some mysterious manner get cleared out of the way: without faith of this kind inspiration sinks to the dull level of wisdom.

Sarah Miller was a woman with a mission—a mission, however, of a personal not of a general nature. Her mission as she read it was to insure the worldly happiness of her beloved mistress, and her faith in the inspiration which prompted the task was such as to make her believe that she would succeed.

Everything in this woman's life turned on her devotion to Beatrice. Her mind was like a dark, sunless ruin, in the centre of which springs one pure white marble column, and that column her love for her mistress. The wild words she once used when telling Frank Carruthers what she could do for Beatrice's sake, if anything, fell short of the truth.

It is absurd to suppose that any one of us is entitled to such adoration from a fellow-creature. Very probably David himself did not deserve Jonathan's unparalleled devotion any more than Beatrice deserved that of Mrs. Miller. Nevertheless, if human affection were doled out into the scale against personal merit most of us would fare extremely

ill in this world. Simple justice, like pure republicanism, and many other indisputably correct things, works better in theory than in practice. Mrs. Miller's strange worship of Beatrice must be sought for in causes other than the girl's merits or even her servant's gratitude.

It was the outpour of an impetuous, passionate nature, dammed and diverted from its proper course by the stony barrier raised by the creed of predestination. It was something which, if dreary Calvinism had not beaten it back to earth, would have soared heavenwards, and have there found a legitimate field for expansion and exercise. Had Sarah Miller's religious education, or the bent of her peculiarly constructed mind, been such as to lead her to follow a more cheerful profession of faith, she would have been an ardent and, perhaps, happy Christian devotee, walking this earth with her eyes turned heavenwards, as do those who look upon this life as nothing more than a comma in the endless volume of eternity. Alas! such a beatific state was far beyond her reach.

The belief that ages and ages before she was born her place, not only in this world, but also in the next, had been irrevocably fixed, the terrible conviction that she was one of the many doomed by God's will to eternal torture, a fate which neither the prayers of a lifetime nor the conduct of a saint could avert or in the slightest degree mitigate; this fearful belief closed round her like the walls of a prison from which there is no escape, from which death itself is no release. How in such a state of mind could she turn with feelings of love and adoration to the Supreme Being who had doomed her to such unutterable woe? No, she could fear Him, tremble before Him, abase herself at His feet, pray her wild hopeless prayers; but such love as she had to give was fain to bestow itself upon an earthly object, and for want of a better that object was Beatrice.

With such a doctrine, doubly dreadful when joined to the assurance of its personal application, it is no wonder that Sarah Miller's mind was not quite so well balanced as that of an ordinary happy-go-lucky believer in the efficacy of a simple deathbed repentance. The wonder is that

there should be men and women in this world who hold views all but identical with Mrs. Miller's and still remain sane. But the more one studies the religious side of mankind the more mystified one gets.

This then was the emissary who went forth on behalf of Beatrice, this, the bearer of the flag of truce between her and Maurice Hervey. A strange intermediary, yet possessing some valuable qualifications for the office, insomuch as she was devoted to her own side, hated the foe, and, above all, was full of the belief that in some unknown way she would be guided so as to enable her to bring the negotiation to a satisfactory issue.

She listened with apparent attention to Beatrice's many and clear instructions; but her thoughts were in reality far away. In this matter she believed she was called upon to act more the part of a principal than that of an agent. Beatrice, who was anxious to know how Hervey was to be found, had to rest satisfied with the assurance that Mrs. Miller would experience no difficulty in tracing him. Provided that Hervey was still in London her assurance was justified, for as his time on ticket-of-leave had not yet expired, his address could no doubt be obtained upon application in the proper quarter.

This was about the only detail Sarah had as yet stooped to consider. She had not yet thought how her end was to be gained, whether by threats or by entreaties. She felt that all she had to do was to meet the man face to face, and then she would find herself guided to act for the best.

Beatrice, who had some misgivings on the score of allowing her faithful servant to make so long a journey unprotected, had carefully looked up routes and trains. She fancied that Sarah would travel in greater ease and safety if she went to England *via* Paris, by the great through express train which runs across Europe from Constantinople to Paris, stopping only two or three times in each country which it traverses. So Mrs. Miller travelled in such luxury as a railway train can offer.

She reached London without any mishap. Here she went to a friend's, the one to whose care Beatrice's corre-

spondence had been entrusted. After a night's rest had dispelled the fatigue of the journey, she began the first part of her mission—that of finding Maurice Hervey.

The task was a simple one. She inquired until she ascertained where the register of ticket-of-leave men resident in London was kept; then, upon applying at the proper office, and satisfying the authorities that she sought the man for no evil purpose, the address was given her. She took a cab and drove straight to it.

Hervey, who had by effluxion of means been thrown from the lap of luxury on to the hard floor of bare existence, was housed in what was little more than a garret. Indeed the money which Mr. Field paid him on behalf of Frank Carruthers was the one plank between him and starvation. He had parted with his rings and other valuables. All that he could call his own was a decent suit of clothes. This he had clung to tenaciously, knowing that if it comes to begging, a fairly-dressed man has a better chance of awakening sympathy than one who is in rags and tatters. The contrast between decent broadcloth and empty pockets is so painful that when asked, one feels compelled to do something to tone it down.

He was sitting in his cheerless, sordid room, smoking his short pipe and working out schemes of vengeance and plunder much as he had worked them out in his secluded state in Portland prison. He was cursing his own clumsiness and want of foresight, as indeed he cursed them at least a hundred times a day. He was unwashed and unshorn, and his right arm, although nearly mended, was still in one of those shiny black slings. Altogether the man was in a condition of body and mind far from enviable.

For hours he had been sitting and thinking of the glorious life he would lead as soon as he could ascertain the whereabouts of his wife. Then he would be able to soar out of this slough of poverty, and eat, drink, and be merry. No wonder that when, after the ceremony of a slight knock, Sarah Miller opened the door and stood before him, a cry of absolute joy sprang from his lips. Next to Beatrice she was the one he most wished to see. Now that she was

here, Beatrice must also be accessible. His cheek flushed, his eyes brightened. If the privations which he had been enduring had at any time urged him to promise to himself that if good fortune brought him again in communication with his wife his hand should rest lighter upon her, the thought vanished as his visitor crossed the threshold. His time of triumph was at hand, and his one idea was to wring all that could be wrung from her whose youthful folly had linked her life to his. He felt contempt for her weakness in having given him, by sending her servant to seek him, the chance he so sorely needed.

Sarah, with her white, thin face, as usual thrown into strong relief by her sombre garb, stepped towards Hervey and stood looking at him with that peculiar rapt expression which at times came over her features. As soon as he had recovered from his surprise at this unhopèd-for visit, Hervey eyed the woman curiously, but for a while there was silence between them. Still she continued to gaze and gaze at the man, not in anger, not in fear, but as one actuated by motives of curiosity. It was a kind of gaze which no one could be expected to endure for long without showing symptoms of impatience.

"What the devil are you looking at me like that for?" asked Hervey. His rough voice brought Sarah back to herself. She drew her hand across her brow.

"It is there, it is written there," she muttered.

"What is written there, you old fool?" asked Hervey.

She made no reply, but her thin lips moved, and again her eyes glanced at him with a strange, wild look.

"Sit down," said Hervey sharply; "and try and talk like a sensible woman, and keep your wits from wandering."

He pushed a chair towards her. She sat down, and seemed waiting for him to speak again.

"Well, what do you want?" he said. "I suppose she sent you?"

"Yes, my mistress sent me."

"What for? Has she sent me any money, or is she trying to starve me? Let her take care. I shall find her again some day." •

"Yes," said Sarah, in curious, mechanical accents. "Yes, she has sent you money."

"How much is it? Hand it over."

She drew a small bag from her pocket. Hervey clutched it eagerly. "There is fifty pounds," she said in the same mechanical way as before.

"Fifty pounds!" exclaimed the man fiercely. "What does she mean by sending me a paltry sum like that? Fifty pounds whilst my wife has thousands a year!"

"Take it or leave it, as you choose," said Sarah.

"I'll take it, never fear. Oh yes, I'll take it. Perhaps it's meant as a peace-offering. Now let me hear what else you have to say. You didn't come here just to give me this wretched sum."

Mrs. Miller rose from her seat and looked down into the man's upturned face. Her voice when she spoke underwent a marvellous change. It absolutely rang with passion.

"No, Maurice Hervey," she cried. "I come to offer you the one chance, to show you the one way which is still open. It may be too late to tread it, but I say to you, show mercy and perhaps mercy may be shown to you. Be warned, I say, and leave that poor girl in peace. Live your life and let her live hers. She is one of God's chosen, Maurice Hervey. Beware how you war against Him. His anger is like a two-edged sword——"

"Keep your flights to yourself, and tell me in plain English what you mean."

"Take the money she offers you. Go and trouble her no more."

Hervey laughed his mocking laugh. "My dear Sarah," he said, "your zeal makes you anticipate matters. I must remind you that as yet I have been offered no money."

"But Miss Beatrice will pay you money," said the woman eagerly. "Oh, take it, take it! Go away and never seek her again."

"Ah! now you're coming to business. What money will she pay?"

"She will give you five hundred a year."

A scowl passed over Hervey's face, but he restrained the oath which rose to his lips. "You are sure that's the best offer, Sarah?"

"She will give no more."

"And if I refuse it, what then?"

Sarah cast a quick glance around, and showed that she fully comprehended the squalor of Hervey's present abode. "If you refuse it," she said, "I shall go back to her, and tell her you cannot be found. Then you will be left to starve. Starvation is hard work, Maurice Hervey."

"You hag," cried Hervey; "you would lie to her."

"I would do more than lie for her sake," said Mrs. Miller. "Will you take the money?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Needs must when the devil drives," he said airily. "Yes, Sarah, I can't help myself; I must close with the generous offer. Now tell me where to find my devoted wife, so that I may convey the news of my submission."

"You will take it?" said Sarah breathlessly.

"Have I not said I must?"

"Thank God!" As she spoke she clasped her hands and murmured words of thanks. Hervey watched her with a curious look on his face. She saw it and it startled her. "You will sign papers?" she said.

"Oh yes, I'll sign anything. Now tell me where to find her."

"No, no. You cannot see her. She will get everything done. The lawyer will get the papers ready, and when you have signed them the money will be paid."

"Very well," said Hervey carelessly. "There's nothing more to say then."

The readiness with which he acceded to her stipulations roused Mrs. Miller's distrust. "Do you mean to play me false?" she asked. "Will you swear on the Bible to keep your promise?"

"Certainly I will, but I'm afraid there's no Bible in this house to swear on. A sad state of things which shall be rectified before you come again."

Mrs. Miller made no reply to his jeering words. She

opened a small bag which she carried, and drew out a well-thumbed, worn Bible. Hervey smiled his contempt.

"Place your finger between the leaves," she said solemnly, "then kiss the sacred book and swear, so help you God, you will keep your promise."

"It must be a left-handed oath," he said as he obeyed her. She clasped her hand over his, and when with a sneer on his lips he had taken the prescribed oath, she opened the book and marked the verse on which his finger had at random been placed. "Read," she said, "and be warned." Hervey read—

"God shall likewise destroy thee for ever."

Without another word she closed the book and left the room. As the door closed Hervey laughed a scornful laugh. He waited until she must have reached the street, then ran swiftly down the stairs. The lower part of the house was used as a kind of marine-store, and in the shop were two lads of about seventeen. He called one of them.

"A lady dressed in black just went out. Follow her and find out where she goes and I'll give you a sovereign."

The boy, who knew something about the state of the lodger's finances, looked amused, but did not budge. "Make haste, you fool," cried Hervey. "Here's the money waiting—see it!"

The sight of a real tangible sovereign sent the lad off in double quick time, and, utterly unsuspecting evil, Beatrice's ambassador was cleverly tracked to her temporary abode.

Meanwhile, Hervey returned to his garret in a joyful frame of mind. However matters might turn out, a comfortable change in his circumstances had taken place. The worst that could happen would insure him a comfortable income, but, so far as he could arrange it, he meant to avoid the worst. He meant to find Beatrice, and, by the power he held over her, force her to surrender to him all save a bare pittance. Let her only be once more within his grasp, and he would take care that she escaped no more. He ground his teeth as he thought what he had already paid for an act of carelessness. The chance of repairing it was at last within reach. He positively gloated

as he pictured the horror with which his wife would greet him when he again invaded her retreat. He laughed in glee at the paternal right which furnished a weapon so sharp to smite, so irresistible, to compel her to yield to his demands. Yes, money and revenge were once more within his reach.

His spy returned in due course. He had earned his sovereign, for he was able to give Hervey the name of the street and the number of the house to which Sarah Miller had gone. Hervey laughed again. He dressed himself, visited the barber's, and then went to keep watch on Sarah's abode.

He watched until nightfall. Early dawn found him once more at his post. Noon and evening he was still there, and evening brought him the reward of his patience. A cab drove up to the door, a box was placed upon it, and a dark-robed figure entered it. The door was shut, and away rolled the cab.

It was scarcely out of sight when Hervey rang the bell of the house, and asked if Mrs. Miller was in. No, she had just left. Ah, that was unlucky; he wanted to see her on important business. Where could he find her?

"You'll have a long way to go unless you can overtake her," said the woman of the house, laughing. "She's just off to foreign parts."

"Going abroad! Where is she going?"

"All the way to Munich, wherever that may be."

His heart leapt. At any rate now he knew where to find his quarry. "Munich!" he exclaimed. "I must try and overtake her before she goes. What station is it?"

"Charing Cross. I heard her tell the man."

He bid his informant adieu with scant ceremony. He hailed the first cab he saw, and was soon rattling in pursuit of Sarah. Although he did not know at what time the train started, he was quite at ease as to catching it. He knew the grace which a woman always allows herself in the matter of trains. He had judged rightly, for the first thing he saw upon entering the station was Mrs. Miller at the office, engaged in registering her box. He ventured to

creep close to her, and heard her, with the incredulity which a woman invariably displays when she surrenders personal custody of her luggage, twice inform the clerk that she was going to Munich by way of Paris. After hearing this Hervey slipped away, took his ticket, and, having watched Sarah enter the train, took his seat in another compartment. So that Beatrice's emissary, as she started on her return journey, joyful at the apparent success of her mission, little thought that she was in something of the same position as the man who, according to the old German legend, carried unwittingly the demon of plague into the village which held all who were dear to him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PURSUED.

FOR hours and hours Mrs. Miller remained blissfully ignorant of the fact that the wheels which were bearing her to her destination bore also sorrow and ruin in the person of Maurice Hervey. The fellow-travellers did not confront each other until the next morning, and when the through train was well out of Paris. Sarah, indeed, had been all but invisible since she boarded the Dover and Calais boat. The crossing had been a rough one, and sea-sickness claims precedence with the mind the most preoccupied. Sarah had suffered much, and as soon as she found herself in the smooth-going train, had sought forgetfulness of her woes in sleep. Hervey, who had no wish to precipitate matters by an untimely revelation of his presence, had also effaced himself from general observation.

But some time after the train had left the Paris and Lyons station Sarah opened the door of her comfortable compartment, and in the narrow gangway of the train came full upon Maurice Hervey. He was smoking, and watching the flying landscape through the glass windows at the side of the narrow passage. He turned, looked at Sarah, and laughed in cruel merriment as he saw her gaze of horrified surprise.

"You!" she gasped. "You have followed me!"

"Every step since you left my humble abode, my dear Sarah."

She turned away and re-entered the compartment she had left. Hervey followed her, and with a laugh threw himself down on the seat nearest to the door. The train

was not full, and the compartments were small ones, so it happened that the two people were alone.

It was typical of the man's cruel nature that he looked forward with feelings of keen enjoyment to the torture which he meant to inflict upon the woman during those hours of travel, by forcing upon her the presence which he knew so unwelcome.

"Oh yes, Sarah," he said jeeringly; "I followed you, and I shall never leave your side until you lead me to my beloved wife. It's no good thinking you can give me the slip. To save trouble I may tell you I know you are going to Munich. What a clever woman you are, Sarah. I am so much obliged to you."

She wrung her hands convulsively, then covered her face and moaned. She had acted, as she thought, for the best, but this man's craft had overcome her. Her mistress was to be made to suffer, and through her. Through the one who would willingly sacrifice body and soul to save her from pain!

"Don't be sulky, Sarah," said Hervey. "The game's up now; you may as well give in. Here, make yourself useful and fill my pipe. I can't use this confounded right arm of mine."

She took no notice of his request, but presently she raised her head and looked at him.

"Be warned," she said in low tones. "Once more, I say, be warned in time. Leave this train at the next station. Fly while you can."

He laughed scornfully. "Now, is it likely?" he said.

She made no further appeal. She sank back into stony silence, and from that time no remark, no question, no taunt of the man's could draw a word from her thin lips. Hour after hour went by and Sarah Miller sat in her corner motionless and silent as a statue.

But her thoughts! Her thoughts were busy enough. They thronged and invaded her brain. They changed and shifted from incoherence to systematic arrangement and back again to incoherence. Through all the jumble the one fearful truth shone out distinctly. She was taking this man to her mistress.

No food had passed her lips since she left London. All desire to eat had left her when she first caught sight of Hervey's hateful form. Her hands were hot; her veins seemed full of fever, and now and again a mist seemed to close round her, from which she emerged only to see once more the cruel face of her tormentor. So the hours went by.

Hervey had food sent into the carriage. He also consoled himself at short intervals with brandy and water. He bought cigars, smoked them, and grumbled at their badness. Sometimes he rose, walked out into the gangway and stretched his legs, but he kept a keen watch on the woman. Not a second time would he fail from lack of vigilance. For amusement he now and again taunted his companion, and his jeers apparently unnoticed drove her to the verge of desperation. Her hands grew hotter, her pulses beat with fiercer rapidity.

The sun sank; the twilight died away; the lamps were lit. Every hour, every moment brought grief nearer and nearer to Beatrice. Long before another sun rose the train would be at Munich. The thought maddened the white-faced woman.

Shortly after leaving Stuttgart the steward looked in and in broken English suggested that the beds should be prepared. Mrs. Miller shook her head, and signified that she had no wish to retire to rest. Hervey ordered more brandy and also declined the proffered couch. The steward wished that he could have the refusal of one of those unmade couches and the time to occupy it, shrugged his shoulders, and withdrew. The travellers were once more alone. In less than five hours the journey would be at an end.

Suddenly a wave of inspiration flooded the poor woman's harassed brain,—an inspiration which made all things clear as day. A strange brilliancy shone in her eyes. In a flash she saw, or believed she saw, to what end these things were leading. God's hand was at work.

Had she not dreamed a dream in which Maurice Hervey figured! Had she not persuaded herself when she first saw him that she had seen written in his face that his

days were numbered? Was she not sure—sure as she was of her own eternal condemnation—that God meant Beatrice to taste happiness as well in this world as in the next? The hour of deliverance was at hand. The inspiration which had told her that her errand would be crowned with success was not that of a lying spirit. God was at work. Hervey had been led to take this journey; to break the promise he had made; and thereby accept the fate foreshadowed by the fearful words to which his finger had fortuitously pointed. This journey, begun in craft, and in defiance of God's warning conveyed through herself, would never be ended. She, by the light of her wild faith, read the Divine purpose plainly as if it was written in letters of fire.

If the line of demarcation between fanaticism and madness in the poor woman's brain was not by now entirely obliterated, it had grown faint, blurred, and indistinct. She was hovering on the verge of insanity, and the method which sometimes lies in madness was at work and supplying the loss of the reasoning faculties. Now that the truth had come to her, now that she knew by inspiration why this man had been permitted to trace and follow her and for a while enjoy his triumph, she found herself speculating and wondering how and by what means the interposition of the Divine hand would be shown. She waited for the moment when, from some apparently earthly cause, the cup of triumph would be dashed from his lips. She waited and waited, and although the hours passed without a sign, never wavered in her belief that even at the last moment deliverance would be brought about.

Once or twice she turned and looked at her companion, and by the same strange fancy which had before seized her, persuaded herself that the something which she imagined she saw in his face, and which betokened approaching death, grew more and more distinct. She felt no pity for the man; nor would she have dared to attempt a second warning; but she gazed on him with a kind of awe, raised by the thought that in a brief space of time this wretched creature would be lying in the place appointed for him, lying there, and to lie there, for ever, and ever, and ever!

Her madness, if it may be called madness, deepened as the time passed by. After all, in spite of its claims to superiority, the mind is but the slave of the body. The yoke may be thrown aside for a while, but sooner or later its pressure becomes apparent. Fatigue and want of food were with Sarah Miller completing what distress had begun. Yet to herself it seemed that she had never seen things clearer, never reasoned more cogently than at this moment when her brain was taxed beyond endurance.

How would God act? Would He strike this man dead as he sat there? Would something frightful happen? Would the train be overturned? As this question exercised her, every jolt as the wheels passed the points sent a thrill through her and made her fancy the moment was at hand.

No. This could not be the appointed method. Merciless as her creed taught her to believe the One to whom she prayed, her sense of justice forbade her to suppose that many other lives must be sacrificed for the sake of destroying Maurice Hervey. She must wait patiently and in faith, not anticipate God's purpose. But the time was growing very short!

Suddenly she turned and knelt on the floor of the carriage. She offered up a prayer that things might be made clear to her; that her agony of suspense might be brought to an end. Hervey watched her and laughed aloud.

"Quite right, Sarah," he said. "Never neglect your religious observances. I am afraid you can't pray yourself out of this situation; but there's no harm in trying."

The sound of his voice gave another and a fresh turn to her thoughts. At that moment her prayer was answered and everything grew clear. The clouds which troubled her rolled away, or, it may be, closed round her to break no more.

She shivered, and, still kneeling, turned her face to the speaker. Her look, for a moment startled him in spite of the contempt he felt for her religious vagaries. And well it might startle him.

Now she knew all. She knew why she had lived. She

knew to what she was predestined. Cycles ago this moment had been decreed. It was she whom God had appointed to remove this man from the path which led one of the elect to happiness. Even as Jael, even as Judith, had their mission, so had she, Sarah Miller, a mission equally terrible, that of slaying a man whom God had doomed. With her brain flooded, permeated by this one fearful thought, the woman rose from her knees and resumed her seat.

Everything she fancied, with her mind bewildered in reality, yet to herself seemingly clear, pointed to the carrying out of this decree of destiny. The solitude, the night journey, even the man's half-helpless condition, were but details of a settled scheme. The opportunity was here, only the way and the means were wanting. These in good time would be vouchsafed to her. She would be shown how she, a weak woman, was to take the life of a strong man.

Little did Maurice Hervey, as, from the effects of fatigue, cigars, and brandy, he sat half-dozing in the corner of the compartment, dream what thoughts were passing through the mind of the woman near him. To him she was nothing more than an addle-headed sort of creature, who once upon a time had done a great deal towards bringing him to ruin; an act for which he rightly believed he was now paying her in full.

How was she to do it? Time was passing, and yet the path was not yet pointed out. See, the man's eyes were closed! Had the moment come? If she had a knife she might even now drive it into his heart! But she had no knife; had nothing which would serve her need, or rather God's need. Suddenly she remembered, as one remembers a dream, that hours and hours ago she had seen a fellow-passenger opening a bag, and had noticed on the top of that bag a pistol. Had she been allowed to catch sight of the weapon for the purpose which she was deputed to carry out? If so, where was that pistol, and how could she get it into her hands? She rose, and without any settled object passed Hervey and stepped out into the gangway.

Her movement awoke him. He put his head through

the door and watched her as a cat watches a mouse. Sarah went the length of the long carriage, but found nothing to guide her to her end. Every door was hermetically sealed. It seemed as if she and her companion were the only persons awake. The only sound heard was the ceaseless rush of the train as it tore its way on and on through the night.

The woman returned and resumed her seat. The means had not yet been given her. A phantom of common-sense also flitted through her mind. If she killed this man in such a manner, it meant arrest and trial of herself. It meant shame and exposure to her loved mistress. No, she must wait yet a while. God had not yet spoken the last word; not yet shown the exact way in which His work was to be done. Yet her belief never swerved, never wavered.

Or not until she knew that the end of the long dreary journey was close at hand; not until a kind of instinct told her that in a few short minutes Munich would be reached. Hervey, whom necessities had deprived of the means of telling the time, was still sleeping his wakeful and suspicious dog's-sleep. Suddenly the long shrill whistle sounded. The man started up wide awake, and for the first time for hours a doubt as to her true reading of God's purpose flashed through Sarah Miller's brain. The time was so short. There was so much—so much to be done. The way was still in darkness. Would the last few moments light it up?

She clenched her hands convulsively, digging the nails of one into the flesh of the other. She glanced once more at Hervey's face, which from his fatigue looked pale and wan. She rose, and mechanically, like one in a dream, stepped out of the compartment into the dimly-lighted gangway. Hervey followed her.

Without knowing why or wherefore, she walked the whole length of the carriage. In a dazed way she opened the door at the end and stepped out into the open air. Hervey followed her, and the door closed behind them, and the man and the woman stood alone on the iron platform which lies between one carriage and its forerunner.

The train had not yet slackened speed. Its wild rush still whipped the naturally calm air into a fierce gale. The woman's dark hair, which had come untwisted, streamed behind her in elf locks. A tall black figure, with a white, a death-white face and burning eyes, staring fixedly at the destination to which the train was hurrying her, as fixedly as her mind was turned to the work which she yet believed she was doomed to execute.

The night was cloudy and moonless. Some way ahead, a little to the right, the lights of the great city lit up the dark sky. It was on these lights that Sarah Miller's eyes were fixed; her lips the while muttering inaudible words.

For a few moments Hervey stood in silence by her side. Then he spoke. "It's no good, Sarah, you can't give me the slip. I'll follow you everywhere. Be a sensible woman for once, and don't give me more bother."

She spoke, but not in answer to his words. "That glare! that red glare!" she cried in a thrilling voice. "Look at it! Look at it well! Do you know what it means to you and to me?"

Before he could reply she answered her own question. "It is the red glare of hell," she cried in still wilder accents. "The glare of the fire which burns for you and for me. The shriek! Hear the shriek of the damned!"

Once more the whistle sent its piercing scream of warning far on the night air; and in another moment the strong brakes would have fallen on the great wheels. Hervey, really startled by his companion's wild bearing, turned to her savagely.

"Here, no nonsense!" he said roughly.

These were the last words he spoke. Suddenly, and without the slightest warning, the woman threw herself upon him. Her arms clasped him with the strength of frenzy. Her weight threw him off his balance. He staggered backwards. He made one wild grab with his uninjured arm at the iron rail, missed it, and most likely could not have held it had he caught it, then slipped down the three or four iron steps, and, with the woman's arms still holding him, the two fell with a fearful thud on to the six-foot way. His

cry, if he had time to raise one, was lost in the rush of the train and the shriek of the steam-whistle. All was over in a second—the train was speeding on, leaving behind it a dark mass lying between the up and the down lines. At the very last moment the way had been made clear to Sarah Miller. Even as she fell with her victim her one thought was of frenzied joy that she had found the means to do God's work.

For a minute or two after the last carriage of the train had swept by, that black mass lay motionless in the six-foot way. Then part of it began to show signs of life. Slowly and painfully the woman detached herself from her victim. She rose to her knees, and remained there staring fixedly at the white face that looked up to her own. Her frenzy for the moment had passed, and she scarcely knew what had happened or what she had done.

She was unhurt. The man had struck the ground first, and so borne the brunt of the shock. His head had fallen heavily on the ballast of the line, and he lay without sense or motion. Was he dead?

This, when her disjointed and scattered thoughts were once more able to resume the terrible kaleidoscopic pattern into which fanaticism had shaken them, was the one question asked by the woman. She felt for the moment no remorse, no horror, but the dread seized her that her hand might have failed; that the work might not yet be done; that she had not fulfilled her destiny. She bent over the prostrate man and placed her cheek close to his lips.

He breathed! She felt the faint breath on her cheek! She laid her hand on his heart and felt its pulsations, slowly distinct. She sprang to her feet with a sharp cry of distress. She had failed! Hervey was alive and would recover. The work had not been done!

She peered wildly into the darkness. She scarcely knew for what she looked. A large stone, a piece of iron, anything which would show her that the hand which had guided her so far on the fearful road of fate had not deserted her; but she found nothing, absolutely nothing which could serve her need.

But suddenly, away along the down line she saw a round red light creeping apparently nearer and nearer. Her heart leapt at the sight. To the uttermost bitterest end the way was clear. The final word had gone forth, the final revelation was made to her.

She placed her hands under the man's shoulders, and by an effort of strength, desperate and far beyond what might have been expected from her frame, dragged him over the few feet of roadway which lay between him and the metals. He groaned once or twice, but remained senseless and motionless as she placed him right in the track of the coming train.

The red light was close—close at hand, but the man lay still and recked nothing of it. The woman having accomplished her ghastly work, wound her black shawl tightly round her head, then fell upon her knees, waited, and lived an age in every moment.

She heard, through the muffling, the rush, she felt on her hands the wind of the metal monster as it swept by ; but she heard or felt no more. She rose and shuddered convulsively ; then, without a glance to see what her hand had wrought, stepped over the line, down the steep embankment, and was lost in the night. She had done what she believed to be her appointed task. No longer would Maurice Hervey stand between Beatrice and happiness !

The poor wretch was almost cut in two. The wheels which had crushed the life out of him were those of an engine on its way to pick up trucks on a siding some way down the line. The driver felt the slight obstruction, and having marked the spot where it occurred, upon his return stopped the train, and knew what had caused that momentary jolt—knew that a man's life had, in that second, passed away.

The body was picked up, placed in a truck, taken to the Munich station, and thence to the place appointed for the reception of the bodies of unknown men who met with a sudden or a violent death.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

" I AM MAD."

IF by any chance Beatrice, who certainly had trouble enough to make her wakeful, had risen with the dawn of the morning which followed the tragedy, and looked out of her casement, she would have seen a sight which would have caused her much surprise. She would have seen Sarah Miller, whom she believed to be in England, standing on the opposite side of the street ; utter despair and anguish written in every lineament ; gazing at her mistress's window like one bidding the object, the dearest on earth, an eternal farewell—eternal because even the consoling hope of a meeting in some future state is absent. But Beatrice, who, in the earlier watches of the night, had been awake for hours with her sorrow, slept on until the sun was high. Perhaps it was well for her she did so.

The poor self-appointed instrument for working the Divine Will had, after she left the scene of her dark work, wandered about the outskirts of Munich, aimlessly and hopelessly. Had it been broad daylight, and had there been persons to see her, an occasional stifled moan and a wringing of the hands would have been all that showed the agony of mind she endured. But it was not, as might be supposed, the agony of remorse. It was agony at the thought of the further sacrifice which such sense as still was hers told her she must make, in order that the desired and predestined results might follow the act of the night.

She was mad and she was not mad. On what may be called the religious side of the question, her mind, as may be guessed from her deeds, was gone past redemption. It

may be that this had been her true state for years ; ever since she had accepted as true the inexorable logic of creed which she had partly been taught, partly framed for herself. The fire may have been burning for years, giving now and again transient flashes, and only waiting for certain circumstances to fan it to a consuming flame. The fierce burst was now over, but the fire would burn and not again be hidden until it had devoured life as well as reason.

She had killed, murdered this man in all but cold blood. Apart from the horror attendant on the actual execution of the crime—a horror which began to haunt her and be ever with her—she felt no poignant misery, no maddening regret. In her wild disjointed way she lamented, not the man's death, but the fact that she had been chosen to bring it about. She lamented it even as Judas might have lamented the hard fate which, in order that prophecy should be fulfilled, singled him out, and decreed that he should betray his Master. And if it be true that a providence saves and slays, who shall say that the woman's mad reasoning was unsound? Are not faith and logic mortal foes, who shall only be reconciled when the lion lies down with the lamb?

On the other side, the material side, Sarah Miller was, as yet, sane, or nearly so. She could look forward, plan, and even carry out. And the anguish which racked her mind was the home-coming of the truth, that her act must part her and her mistress for ever. Here was the crowning sacrifice. Here was, perhaps, the earthly punishment. Never again to gaze into that dear face ; never again to hear that loved voice ; never again to be near her to minister to her wants, to aid her, scheme for her, and, if needs be, sin for her. Never to see her in the happiness which had been so dearly bought. Here was the sacrifice ! It must be made, and she must find strength to make it, and skill to insure its being of use.

To see her mistress, to meet her ever once more, would be to ruin all. She must never know whose hand it was bore her freedom. She would never suspect that her servant had been the means of cutting the knot which it seemed

no earthly power could undo. Ah, no earthly power could have undone it.

So, when at last the morning broke gray, and trees and other objects loomed phantom-like and unreal through the mist, Sarah Miller planned and schemed, seeking the way to insure what she had so dearly bought. All her thoughts reached one end. She must fly far, far from the spot. Beatrice must never hear of her again; never know that she left London. If her proximity to the dead man became known the truth might be guessed and all be lost.

Yet before she went she must see the house in which her darling lived. She must stoop and kiss the doorstep on which those loved feet had trodden. She must waft her one passionate and unheeded farewell, then leave the place and be as one dead.

She struggled against the desire, but it overcame her. With the first streaks of daylight she entered the sleeping city, and, utterly worn out, stood before her mistress's window, and for a while watched it as one might watch the last fading ray of a sun which has sunk never again to rise, and lighten the darkness which shall be eternal.

At that early hour of the morning the street was silent and deserted. There was no one to notice the strange-looking creature who stood and, with wild despair in her eyes, for ever gazed on one spot. Her look for the time was such that no one, not even the one most preoccupied with his own concerns, could have passed her without feeling his curiosity raised as to why she was lingering there, and what gave her that appearance of dire distress.

After some minutes spent in this manner, the woman crossed the road. Her limbs dragged after her and made her exhausted state apparent. She leant her head against the door of the house which held her mistress, and sobbed convulsively. A dizzy feeling came over her, and she felt that she was upon the point of fainting, and falling senseless on the doorstep. By a supreme effort she roused herself and shook off the incipient stupor. If once she sank down her weary limbs might rebel and refuse to do her bidding. She might lie there until her presence was

discovered, and that discovery ruin all. No, if she were to sink and perhaps die, let it be as far away from Beatrice as her waning strength could carry her. Sweet as it would be to breathe her last within reach of her mistress, even such poor comfort could not be vouchsafed to her.

It speaks volumes for the iron strength of her will, inasmuch that it struggled with and overcame, not only the woman's physical fatigue, but also the craving for one glimpse of Beatrice which chained her to the spot. She tore herself away, and without once looking back, forced her tired limbs to bear her to a considerable distance. Here she found a quiet doorstep on which she sat unmolested—sat and fought against her exhaustion, until such time as she would be able to procure food.

It was not long before, slowly, little by little, unit by unit, the city began to awake. Here and there the shutters went down from a shop, and at last the weary woman saw all but facing her a baker's window. She entered the shop, bought some bread, and begged a glass of water. Not for her own sake, but for the sake of another, she was called upon to eat and drink.

She ate her bread, and then somewhat strengthened again began her pilgrimage. She crept through the streets until she reached the railway station. Here she ascertained at what time the next train for the west would start.

She had a long time to wait. She hid herself in one corner of the waiting-room, and sat like a statue. But her brain was burning, and her pulse throbbing. A strange sound, a fierce rushing sound, was ever in her ears; great wheels seemed turning and turning in her head; and if for a moment she dared to close her hot and weary eyes, she saw through the darkness a light, a fierce light, red like blood, and drawing nearer and nearer.

But in spite of all this she was able to take her seat in the train, able to exult that she had found the strength to bear her so far, able to pray that her strength might last until she once more stood in London. Then, all would be safe. No matter what became of her then. The work was finished, what did the future of the tool matter?

The train left Munich, and as it steamed out of the magnificent station, the woman veiled her face with her black shawl. In spite of her conviction that she had but executed a preordained task, she dared not look upon the spot where she had knelt on the previous night. Miles and miles passed before she removed the sombre covering from her white worn face. As the train hurried on, the wheels within her brain whirled faster and faster, the rushing sound grew stronger, and the fierce red light shone redder, fiercer, and nearer.

Save for such inquiries as the exigency of the journey forced her to make, and such speech as was necessary to procure the food and drink which nature absolutely demanded, the woman spoke no word during that long journey back. Except that now and again she pressed them to her brow, in a vain endeavour to stop the wheels which whirled in her brain, her thin hands were for ever clasped beneath her dark shawl. She sat and stared into vacancy. How could she close her eyes, when doing so at once brought the red light before them?

For all she knew that journey might have lasted months or years. Periods of time meant nothing to her now. Eternity, not Time, lay before her.

The long journey by land, the shorter journey by sea, passed like a protracted yet incoherent dream. All she knew or cared to know was that she was speeding on to London. At last the sound of English voices, the sight of English faces, told her that she had reached the last stage of her journey. Then she roused herself and made her final preparations.

She searched her pocket, and tore into small bits every piece of paper it contained, so that no written word could be left to give a clue to her identity. Last of all she drew from an envelope a photograph of Beatrice. She gazed at it long and passionately, and then with a deep sigh tore it across and across, and threw the pieces to the winds. She dared not even keep this poor relic of her darling.

London at last! Sarah Miller stepped from the train, and once more stood on the platform which she had quitted

rather more than three days before. It was now past three o'clock in the morning. Whither should she turn. She stood hesitating and bewildered.

There was one thing more which she had settled to do. What was it? Oh, those wheels, those wheels, will they never stop! She pressed her fingers to her temples, and strove to recall what resolution had slipped from her mind.

Ah, now she remembered what it was. Her money, —she must get rid of that. She had no further need of money now that she had reached the final goal. In her pocket were both German and English coins. She collected them, and creeping stealthily to the box which stands awaiting contributions for some, doubtless, very deserving charity, she dropped in every coin that was upon her person. This done, she believed there was nothing left which could in any way show who she was or whence she came.

She passed out under the archway, a solitary, dark-robed figure with a head bent as in grief. She passed from the ghastly white glare of electric lamps into the all but deserted Strand. She walked some way up the Strand, then, without any definite aim, turned to the right, and by and by found herself on the embankment.

Still she wandered on until she reached Waterloo Bridge. She went halfway across it, then stopped short and gazed over the parapet into the river. But no thought of self-destruction had entered into her head, although the red light was still before her eyes, the wild rush still sounding in her ears, and those fearful iron wheels in her brain circling more rapidly than ever. No, the river had but for her the attraction which a smooth, calm, peaceful stream has for all who are in deep distress. So she looked and looked; even craned over the parapet to peer into its sombre, placid depths.

At that moment a blinding light flashed upon her eyes and a hand grasped her shoulder. "Now none of that nonsense," said a sharp voice—the voice of a policeman who had seen her dark form against the stonework of the bridge. The woman turned her face to his, and the anguish

written upon it persuaded the constable that he had arrived just in the nick of time.

"River air 's bad at night for such as you," he said in a kinder voice. "Now you go straight home like a good woman. I'll see you safe off the bridge. You can go from which end you like, but if you stay here any longer, well, I must run you in."

She clasped her hands. "I am mad!" she cried in piteous, imploring tones. "Can't you see I am, mad? Take me and put me where mad people are sent to."

Strange as a confession of insanity seemed, the puzzled policeman was bound to take her at her word, the more so because she would not or could not give any account of herself, or name any place of residence. So she was led away a docile captive, and spent the rest of the night, or rather morning, under detention.

Mad or not, she believed her work was now done; believed that she would be bestowed where her mistress would never find her, never hear of her. Mad or not, her one concentrated aim was to keep the secret of the way in which Maurice Hervey died. If mad, the poor wretch's cunning had all but supplied the place of reason.

All but, for as usual it had forgotten one important thing. Unless Beatrice was informed of her husband's death, unless that death were proved beyond a doubt, Sarah Miller's crime would be useless and her sacrifice futile.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IT WAS NO DREAM.

CARRUTHERS, as was his custom, called for Beatrice early one morning. Now that he had firmly resolved that he must, would, could, should school himself to accept the position which it seemed likely was to be his for the future, he could see no reason why he should be debarred from enjoying every moment of Beatrice's society. To say that he was resigned to his fate would be absurd. No one is resigned to fate. One is compelled to submit to its tyranny, that is all.

Of course Frank was unhappy, and of course Beatrice was unhappy. At heart they were as wretched as any sentimental schoolgirl would wish them to be amid such circumstances. But all the same they were not so truly miserable as they imagined. Given two young lovers kept apart by fate—with a look-out of eternal darkness—without even the hope of seeing hope glimmer in the distance, so long as they know that each loves the other, even as he or she loves her or him ; so long as they can see each other, talk to each other, even if that talk must be on indifferent subjects, they cannot be altogether unhappy. At least they have the consolation of mutual unhappiness as well as mutual love. Frank and Beatrice would have denied the accuracy of this reasoning, but it is nevertheless true.

This morning Beatrice left her boy in charge of the smiling Bavarian servant and went for a walk with Frank. It was a fair May morning, fairer perhaps elsewhere than

in Munich, which is a dry, dusty, barren land. For some time they walked in silence, and apparently without any settled destination. By and by Carruthers spoke.

"When do you think you will be ready to return to England?" he asked. Her eyes were cast down. She did not answer his question.

"Beatrice, you will take my advice in this?" He spoke gravely and tenderly.

"Yes, I will take your advice. I will do all you wish—be guided entirely by you. Heaven knows I have guided myself long enough. See where it has led me."

Her eyes filled with tears as she spoke. Frank clenched his hands behind his back. He felt so powerless to help her. After all, he could aid her so little.

"What do you propose? What do you think I should do?" she asked.

"I think we should go straight back to England; straight to Oakbury. I will come with you, and if you wish it, tell Horace and Herbert everything."

"What will they say? What will they do? I should think they would at once turn me out of their house."

Frank smiled a sad little smile. "Dear Beatrice," he said, "can you fancy either Horace or Herbert turning out a dog who came to them for protection? That is," he added, "if the dog had not been in the mud."

"Ah, Frank, but I have been in the mud," said Beatrice sadly, "I have years of mud upon me. It will never come off, Frank."

Frank, as a man should, tried to console her, tried to persuade her that the mud was after all neither so very black nor so very thick. She shook her head and refused to believe him. Then came another pause.

"Ah!" said Beatrice, "it all comes back to the old cry—'If what has been done could only be undone!'"

"Yes," said Frank, "the cry of the first man who developed speech, his thought perhaps before speech came to him; and so it will be the cry of the last man who stands on the wreck of the world."

There was silence once more until Frank broke it by

repeating his original question. Beatrice told him she could not leave Munich until Sarah returned.

"But she is in London. Why not telegraph to her? Tell her to wait there."

"I would, but I do not know where to find her. She was going to her friend's. The friend who posted my letters. Sarah used to send them, but I never thought of asking the address."

"And she is making terms with this man," said Frank rather bitterly,— "is empowered to let this ruffian rob you."

"Money is nothing. He can have all he wants if he will trouble me no more."

Carruthers bit his lip. He cared little for money as money, but it enraged him to think of this villain living in luxury at the expense of the woman he had so wronged. However, he believed that when it came to the Talberts having a voice in the matter, Hervey would find himself not so well off as he anticipated.

"Frank," said Beatrice, "I will leave with you as soon as she returns, I promise. Now let us talk of something else. We may have but a day or two longer here. Let me have those days to look back upon—days of calm before the storm broke."

Carruthers understood her. He forced himself to talk to her in something like his old style. The mirth, if it could even be called mirth, was hollow. The imitation rang falsely. But Beatrice was grateful; if only to have her thoughts turned from the one current.

"No one can fully realise what a noble thing it is to be English," said Frank, "until he has returned to London after a tour in Germany. It is a gratifying thing when you enter your hotel and for the first time comprehend the true mission of the great Teutonic race."

"What mission?"

"To find," continued Frank, "that this great nation was created apparently for the purpose of supplying waiters to the English-speaking races. It is a great patriotic truth which has consoled me for many inconveniences I have suffered from its application."

Then he told her about the strange people at his hotel in Munich. About the smart American girls who would call Paris "Parrus." About all the other familiar *table d'hôte* characters.

"It amuses me most," he said, "to talk to the *portiers* and waiters about the king. Every one has some fresh tale about his eccentricities. You know he turns night into day. Starts off driving at one in the morning?"

Yes, Beatrice had of course heard that.

"Floats about on a lake, on top of the palace, and fancies himself Lohengrin. Hides away from every one—do you know why?"

"An unhappy love affair years ago," said Beatrice.

"That may have been the origin of the tomfoolery," said Frank. "But the reason he keeps himself hidden now is not so romantic. He is growing so fat, he is ashamed to show himself. Fancy a fat Lohengrin!"

"I don't believe it," said Beatrice indignantly. "Most ladies look upon King Ludwig as possessed of the beauty of a Greek god."

"It's quite true. The other night he sent for one of the singers from the opera. She had to sit in a punt on the lake and sing to him. Fancy a *prima donna* in a punt singing to an invisible king. Well, the punt was small and the lady stout. Just in the middle of a grand *cadenza* over went the boat. What do you think the king did?"

"Naturally pulled her out."

"Not a bit of it. He rang a bell and walked away, leaving the poor thing to splash. Makes one feel a Republican to hear such things."

So Frank talked, but all his fooling was forced. They had been walking about aimlessly, and scarcely noticing where. "Shall we go anywhere—to one of the galleries?" asked Beatrice.

"No," said Frank. "It's too fine for pictures. Let us go and look at the statue of Bavaria." The statue being a long way off, they took one of those delightful little *fiacres* hired, including a coachman with a broad silver band round

his hat, for something like sixpence the half-hour. One, almost the only, relic of bygone cheap living in Munich.

They inspected the colossal statue, but did not yield to the temptation of going up into its head *via* the leg. They walked through the Hall of Fame at the back of the statue. But sight-seeing did them no more good than Frank's forced gaiety. They were both sad at heart.

"Where shall we go now?" asked Frank as they came back to the *fiacre*. "Is there anything else to see about here?" He couched this question in curious German, and addressed the driver. The driver said the great south cemetery was not far off.

"I don't like cemeteries," said Frank doubtfully.

"I do," said Beatrice. So they drove according to her wish.

They passed under the great arched entrance to the place of tombs. Beatrice, who was now deep in sad thoughts, looked neither to the right nor left—and Frank was only looking at Beatrice. They walked straight into the great open space, and for a while, with the bright May sun shining down on them, wandered about the forest of tombs, which, after the manner of all Continental memorial stones, looked untidy from the withered or tawdry wreaths which had been placed on them last All Souls' Day, and left to decay at ease. Carruthers was somewhat disappointed in the cemetery. Although this was his first visit to Munich, he fancied he had read or heard that this cemetery was one of the finest in Europe. He told Beatrice he was disappointed.

"Perhaps the finest monuments are under the piazza," she said.

They walked across to the broad piazza which runs round the centre space. As Beatrice had suspected, the finest and most costly and artistic monuments were against the wall. Some of them were magnificent works of art, but Carruthers paid them scant attention. Whether it was the melancholy surroundings, or the strain which, at Beatrice's wish, he had put upon himself to keep their conversation away from the subject ever uppermost in their hearts, he

could not tell, but it seemed to him that at this moment his sorrow was more unendurable, more abiding than ever. He glanced gloomily over the broad, white-studded expanse, where slept thousands who had once been men even as he now was a man, who had breathed, eaten, drunk, hoped, feared, loved, and—died.

"This!" he muttered. "To this it all comes. The end of love, the end of ambition, of wealth, of poverty, of pain, of joy. All come to it, and other men and women walk over our graves and wonder who we were. Beatrice! Beatrice!" he cried, in a voice of exquisite agony, "we can live but once, and our life is wasted!"

Bravely as he had borne himself, Carruthers had at last broken down.

Beatrice started. These words were the first which had been wrung from him which implied the slightest reproach. It only wanted this to complete her misery. She bent her head and the tears ran from her eyes. Then she looked at Frank with a pitiful, appealing gaze which went straight to his heart.

"I was a fool—a weak fool," he said. "Forgive me."

"No, you are wise. Oh, why was I ever born!"

"Let us go," said Frank. "I hate this abode of dead mortality."

So with heavy hearts they walked along the broad piazza towards the entrance to the cemetery. Somehow their hands met, and they went hand in hand. There were a few workmen and loiterers about who, seeing them, no doubt thought it was an English custom for a grown-up man and woman to walk so, or that these two were mourning some common loss. They were indeed!

Neither spoke. Carruthers was telling himself that he was weaker than he thought, that he could not bear the situation longer. He would see Beatrice safe in England. He would see this man and insure her future peace. Then he would—he must leave her. To see her, hear her voice, touch her hand, yet know she could not be his was more than he could ask himself to bear.

And Beatrice's thoughts ran much in the same groove.

She had from the first known it must be so. This was why she had begged that the last few days they spent in Munich might be made such as memory loves to linger upon. Such friendship as Frank had spoken of was between them an impossibility.

So as they walked down that piazza they felt that they were bidding each other a farewell which might well be eternal. No wonder their hands refused to part!

As they drew near to the entrance they passed what was to all appearance a shop with a plate glass front opening on the piazza. In front of it were two or three men and women and several children; the last-named on tiptoe and flattening their flat Teutonic noses against the glass. Frank also glanced that way and saw such a curious sight that, in spite of his preoccupation, he stopped.

A little way inside the glass was arranged on banks of evergreens and flowers what seemed to be a dozen dolls, of various sizes, but all large for dolls. Each was dressed in smart long robes with tinsel and other decorations, and each doll bore a large number. A curious sight! Caruthers drew nearer, and then the truth flashed upon him. They were dead babies! There, each in its little nest of leaves and flowers, they lay awaiting the day of burial.

"They are dead!" said Frank, turning to Beatrice.

"Yes. I remember hearing it was the custom here to let them wait like this; but I forgot all about it. A horrible custom, is it not?"

Is it a horrible custom? If startling to strangers is it more horrible than the English custom of letting the poor dead thing lie for days in an upper chamber, lie there often until the last sight one carries away of the loved one is a sight to be forgotten? Who has not known those fearful days which precede an English funeral? The fearful room with its boxed-up odour of death striving with those of sweet-scented flowers, *eau de Cologne*, and carbolic acid. It may seem harsh to bear away the poor dead clay at once, but not so harsh as the custom which jeopardis health for the sake of sentiment.

Is it a horrible custom? Horrible to think of a loved

one exposed to the eyes of the public? Horrible at first sight to watch women bringing children and lifting them up to see what lies behind the glass. But why should the dead fear to face their fellow-creatures' gaze more than the living? Why should the living be taught that the sight of death is so to be dreaded? There are none of the horrors of the *Morgue* here. We must all die, and, by the testimony of myriads of tombstones, go to heaven.

But if the sight is horrible to a stranger it is fascinating. Notice all who visit the Munich cemeteries for the first time. If they peep in at one window of the *Wartsaal* they will peep in at all. Beatrice and Frank formed no exceptions to this rule.

There are several of these windows. In the one next the babies they saw the body of an old priest. He lay on his slanting bier of evergreens, dressed in his best clothes, his cold hands holding the crucifix to his cold heart. He slept with peace written on his sweet waxen face. Was this horrible?

In the next an old woman with silver hair. She slumbered sweetly and calmly as her neighbour. Rest, perfect rest, not horror here.

In the next a young girl with a face worn to all but a skeleton's. She had died of consumption, and looked as one who had willingly given up her last breath. Here was sadness for the death of one so young, but not horror.

And so to the end. With reverent eyes Frank and Beatrice saw them all, the poor dead things lying on their green biers awaiting interment, lying there with a wire fastened to the hand, so that if life was by any chance to return, whether by night or day, a bell must ring and bring aid. But they never ring for aid these poor dead things!

Frank and Beatrice turned away. It seemed to Frank, at least, that the spectacle they had seen was a fitting ending to their excursion. They walked away slowly and in silence. But they had not seen all.

In a room at the very entrance, so that comers and goers might the more readily notice it, lay the body of a man. Not on fragrant boughs, but on a plain slate bier,

for there was no one to authorise the expenditure necessary to give it a bed of evergreens. A black cloth was thrown across the body and the white face was turned towards the window.

And Frank saw that white face and knew it—and Beatrice saw that white face and knew. She grasped Frank's arm, strove to speak, gave a sharp cry, and fell senseless on the stones. Carruthers lifted her and bore her to the *fiacre*. He bade the man drive home at once.

Beatrice revived. She looked at Frank in a dazed way. "I dreamed—it was a dream!" she said in a whisper.

"It was no dream," answered Carruthers in a hoarse, choked voice. Not another word was exchanged until they reached Beatrice's home. Here Frank wanted to accompany her to her rooms. She shook her head.

"Go back, go back," she whispered. "You will see to all, learn everything, will you not?"

He nodded, re-entered the carriage, and drove back to the cemetery. The blood ran fiercely through his veins. This man, the man who stood between him and happiness, dead! It could not be! Such things as this never happen in real life. Some chance resemblance must have misled him and Beatrice. Will Carruthers, who had never yet wished a fellow-creature dead, be blamed because he trembled at the thought?

There was no mistake. He gained access to the room. He saw the body uncovered, saw the sling which had been removed from the broken arm. And as he stood and gazed at the dead man he seemed to hear the voice of the strange servant begging him in wild accents to wait for Beatrice. Her prophecy had come true; her curious faith had not deceived her.

He looked long on the white face. Pity, except the pity one feels for violent death, did not move his heart. But, nevertheless, the man lying there had once been loved by Beatrice,—might, had he so willed, be loved by her even now. How strange it all seemed! At last he turned away.

He had to answer many questions; see sundry officials.

He said he identified the man as one Maurice Hervey, an artist. He could say nothing more about him—nothing about his friends. He had exchanged very few words with him. Then he left money for the corpse to be removed to another *Wartsaal*, and decently laid out. Also money for funeral expenses, and for a stone with H. M. on it to be put over the grave. They told him the funeral must take place on the morrow. Then he went back to Beatrice.

She would not see him; so he left a note saying that all was done. The next day he stood over Maurice Hervey's grave.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OLD FRIENDS AGAIN.

HE did not see her the next day. He called twice; the second time she sent word that she would rather not see him until to-morrow. She was not ill; she would only rather be left alone. So in a curious, indescribable state of mind Mr. Carruthers spent the day in wandering about Munich.

On the morrow he called and was admitted. He found Beatrice alone. She looked pale, but very beautiful. He noticed at once a change in her manner. A certain graceful timidity and shyness seemed to have fallen upon her, which added a new charm to the girl he had hitherto found so calm and self-possessed. Beatrice, it may be, noticed a change also in Carruthers's bearing.

"Tell me all," she said in low tones, as after a quiet greeting he took a chair near her.

He told her all. How the man some nights ago had been picked up on the rails, almost cut in two by the wheels of an engine which had passed over him. How he had been carried into Munich and placed in *Wartsaal*. How, the usual formalities having been observed, he had been left for identification, and then, with or without identification, for burial. He told her what instructions he himself had given, and how yesterday he saw his grave.

Beatrice heard him without interruption. When his recital was finished she sat in deep thought. Frank watched her in silence.

"How did he come there—on the railroad, I mean?" she asked at last.

Frank shook his head. "No one can tell," he said. "It might have been accident, it might have been suicide. From the position in which he was found the authorities incline to the latter. But he had plenty of money in his pocket. I don't know how much, for in these cases the exact amount is never stated. In short, no one knows how it happened."

Frank spoke the truth. No one knew. The railway tickets having been collected long before Munich was reached, for all the officials of the train knew, Hervey and Mrs. Miller might have disembarked with other passengers. The woman's box, which was registered through to Munich, was lying in the luggage office unclaimed. Perhaps it lies there till this day. Her hand-bag went where such things go when left in a train. Could the steward or the guard have seen the dead body they might have recognised it as that of a passenger; but it was put out of sight long before the great train came tearing back from Constantinople. So no one in Munich knew more than was embodied in the official report.

"What brought him to Munich?" asked Beatrice. "How did he know I was here?"

Frank could only shake his head again.

"He must have seen Sarah," she continued, answering her own question. "He must have learnt from her where I was. Why did she not write and tell me? Some harm may have befallen her. I wish she was back."

"Would you like to see his grave?" asked Frank after a pause. Beatrice shivered.

"No," she said, "I think not—unless you would call it unwomanly not to do so."

"No," said Frank. "I can see no reason for it."

"What could I do at his grave?" asked Beatrice softly and dreamily. "One goes to a grave to weep. I could not weep. After a load, which one has for years carried day and night, is lifted from the mind, one does not weep, one rejoices. Frank, I dare not stand over a grave and feel like that. Let me say I forgive him. I can do no more."

"No one who knew all could ask more."

“‘Speak nothing but good of the dead,’” she continued in the same dreamy way. “Frank, I cannot recall any good of which to speak. For a few weeks I loved him, or thought I loved him; but that was years, years ago. Ah me, those years! All I can now do is to say I will speak no evil of him. He is dead. I forgive him, and will try and forget him.”

For the first time the tears rose to her eyes. There was a long pause. Beatrice and Frank were now standing. He took her hands in his and held them.

“Beatrice—darling,” he whispered. “Do you remember the words you said a few days ago—said in this very room? When there seemed no chance of happiness for you and me. Dearest, all is now changed. We are in a new world. Beatrice, will you say once more in our new world what you said in the old?”

Lower and lower she bent her head, and the blush rose and deepened on her white cheek. Then she raised her head, and her gray eyes looked into his. “Let me leave you one moment,” she whispered. Without waiting for the permission she drew her hands from his and glided away, swiftly as she had left him that evening at Hazlewood House, but this time without leaving him hopeless.

She came back in less than a minute, and her boy came with her. Holding him by the hand she stood and looked at Frank.

He understood. He drew the boy to him, sat down and put the little fellow between his knees. Placing one hand on his head, he looked up at Beatrice with a grave smile.

“Dearest,” he said, “children may come to us or not; but this boy shall always be to me as my own son. He shall never mourn for his unknown father, never if I can help, know shame covers that father’s name.”

He raised the child and kissed it. Harry, with whom Carruthers was a prime favourite, put his chubby arms round his friend’s neck. Beatrice watched them and smiled softly.

Carruthers, after disengaging himself from the boy’s

embrace put him gently aside, rose and held out his arms. Beatrice came to them, laid her head on his shoulder, and wept happy tears. He whispered words of passionate love, kissed her again and again, and all the while Master Harry watched the two with childish attention, and wondered what was the meaning of the curious scene. At last they remembered his presence, and Beatrice handed him over to his Bavarian nurse—an act of expulsion which he much resented.

Somehow the thought that death alone had given them the right to love, made Frank and Beatrice's love-making quiet and restrained. They were happy, of course, or Frank was, but not demonstratively happy. After he had told her about a thousand times that he loved her, Beatrice knelt at his side and held his hand.

"Frank, my own Frank," she whispered. "You will never bring the past up against me? I have been wicked, deceitful; but, dearest, I have suffered for it. Frank, you shall know every thought of my heart. I will be a true wife. If anything ever told me that the remembrance of the past made you doubt me, I should die—I should die, Frank."

Of course he took her in his arms and vowed she was the sweetest, truest, noblest, etc. etc. What, in fact, every one vows in a position similar to his.

Then she asked him to leave her for a while—leave her to think over all that had happened. He obeyed. He too wanted to think.

Naturally he called again later in the day, and the two began in a rational way to discuss their plans for the future. Beatrice was very uneasy about Mrs. Miller. She blamed herself for not having taken the address which would reach her in London.

It was settled that they should wait a week longer in Munich, in the hope of hearing news of Beatrice's emissary. Then Carruthers spoke of something which all days he had been revolving in his mind.

"Listen, Beatrice. We are to go back together, and your cause is now my own. There is something to be

faced. There are those who have a right to ask you to explain your absence. But there is a right you can give which will override all others. Dearest, let us return as husband and wife."

She flushed and trembled. "Oh, Frank, how can I? So soon!"

"Soon! Beatrice, it is more than five years. That man was dead to you more than five years ago. He died when your love died."

"True! It is true!" she murmured. "He died then, not now."

"I feel that I do not ask you to do this for selfish reasons," said Frank. "I ask it because it is best for you. A few months' engagement to you would not be weariness, darling. This I must sacrifice." His arm went round her, and their lips met.

"Now for your answer?" he said.

She placed her hand in his. "Let it be as you will, my love, my lord, I have no will but yours—Oh, Frank, Frank! I feel that I can face anything, face anybody, so long as I know that we are not to be parted—know that you are mine for ever!"

So they were married in Munich. Why not? Who was this dead man that he should stand between them? What had he done that he should be considered? That she should truthfully say that she forgave him—that she would speak no evil of him—was all, nay more, than could be justly asked of the woman he had betrayed in even a baser and more callous way than the word usually means when applied to villains and women. Even when he met his death was he not only on his way to work her evil? Maurice Hervey dead a week ago? No, the man she had known as Maurice Hervey died when years ago he dropped his mask, and showed her what lay underneath.

Beatrice and Frank were married. They found an English nursemaid who was going home. They engaged her to accompany them, and take care of the boy. In due time they all reached London. Beatrice's anxiety respecting her faithful servant had now grown very great;

so the first thing they did was to try and gain tidings of her.

The only thing they could do ~~was~~ to apply to the police ; and soon after the description of the missing woman was given they were told that it seemed to answer to that of a woman, unknown, who was in the pauper lunatic asylum. So to the asylum they went, and having been shown the clothes worn by the woman, knew that their fears were well-founded. Frank had felt no doubt about the matter. The nurse's manner on a certain night had assured him as to what the end would be. He told Beatrice so.

Beatrice was greatly shocked and distressed. "Poor Sarah," she said, "she was never mad with me, I could always calm her. She was my right hand for years, Frank. She helped me, tried to shield me"—here Beatrice blushed as painful memories rose—"You will never know how the poor thing loved me, Frank."

No. Frank will never know, nor will his wife know how the woman loved her, and what she did for her sake !

Beatrice saw the doctor and questioned him. He told her that the woman was in a hopeless state ; what appeared to him to be the gloomiest, most incurable kind of religious mania. The chances were she would not live long.

Beatrice begged that she might see her. The doctor shook his head. An interview would do the patient harm. Beatrice would not believe this, and asked the doctor to tell her poor servant that she was here. He could judge from the effect of the news as to the advisability of a visit. The doctor humoured her. He soon returned and said that the mention of her name seemed to redouble the poor woman's delusions. She had turned her face to the wall and made gestures of absolute aversion. Frank drew Beatrice aside.

"My dear girl," he whispered. "Depend upon it she saw this man, let slip the name of Munich, and knew that he was on his way to you. The grief at what she had unwittingly done quite upset her poor brain. She is so troubled at it that she will not see you."

Beatrice went to the doctor. "Oh," she said impulsively,

and with tears in her eyes, "will you go to her once more—only once. Tell her, try to make her understand that I am married and happy,"

Mrs. Carruthers being a beautiful woman in distress, the doctor, being a young man, obeyed. He soon came back shaking his head. It was no use. The effect of his communication had been such that he must strictly forbid a visit. It was, he said, one of the commonest symptoms of such mania, that the patient turned with aversion from those who had been most loved by her. So Beatrice sorrowfully gave up the struggle.

All they could do was to see that Sarah was removed to a place where she could be cared for, and where kind treatment was assured. There, let it be said, she is now. But it will not be for long. The doctors and the keepers know that the days of the poor mad woman, who spends eighteen hours of the twenty-four on her knees, are numbered.

After they had done all they could for Sarah, Frank and Beatrice turned to their own affairs. None of Beatrice's people knew of her being in London. Frank, of course, saw many acquaintances, but as Beatrice knew so few people their companionship created no remark. Upon inquiry at the hotel patronised by the Talberts, they learnt that the brothers had not yet come up for their perennial visit, but were expected next week. So one fine day Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers, the boy and his new nurse, went down to Blacktown.

Our long-lost but, I hope, beloved friends, Horace and Herbert, were one afternoon returning from Blacktown in the large waggonette. As they came up the drive they saw something unusual—something which made them glance at each other with dismay. On the front doorstep, sunning himself, and looking as if Hazelwood House and its appurtenances were his in fee-simple, stood a little boy.

No wonder, the moment some one took the horses' heads, that the Talberts jumped down to inquire what this apparition meant. The loss of the bright hair having so

changed the boy's appearance, they did not at first recognise him, so no wonder that Horace, who connected painful memories with mysterious children, groaned out, "Another child!"

They put their eye-glasses up and saw that the small stranger was making violent demonstrations of friendship. The dancing blue eyes which looked up at them seemed strangely familiar. Herbert was the first to discover the truth.

"It is Beatrice's boy!" he said.

"It is," said Horace solemnly. To make sure they asked him who he was, and whence he came.

He informed them he was "mother's bewchful boy," and he waved his arms to show that the distance he had come was more than his mind could grasp. Then he recommenced his friendly advances, holding up his face in a way which showed he expected to be kissed. He was so imperious and assertive that they yielded. Herbert bent down and kissed him. Horace, who noticed that his brother's appearance as he did so was not dignified, lifted the urchin up and likewise kissed him. Then they went indoors to learn what it all meant.

The child preceded them, and had they harboured any doubts of his identity such doubts would have been set at rest by the way in which the little urchin rubbed his feet. No child who had not lived part of his life at Hazlewood House would have performed the act so thoroughly.

Whittaker was in the hall. "Who are here, Whittaker?" asked Horace.

"Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers, sir," replied Whittaker. The Talberts stared at each other, then, hanging their hats on the proper and respective pegs, entered the drawing-room.

They saw Frank standing there with that quaint, dry smile on his face, and then they saw Beatrice coming towards them with outstretched arms. Herbert again stared blankly at Horace, who could not, however, respond to the look because Beatrice had thrown her arms round his neck.

"Kiss me, Uncle Horace, and say you forgive me," she cried. "I have caused you all sorts of worry and anxiety, but say you forgive me."

She *had* caused them worry and anxiety. Indeed, they had latterly been sorely pressed to account for Beatrice's absence to Lady Bowker and others. Nevertheless she was their sister's child and a thorough Talbert. She was also in distress. So Horace yielded, kissed her, and told her how glad he was to see her again.

After this she went to Uncle Herbert and something of the same scene was gone through. The Talberts then re-arranged their neckties, as much as to say that although such impulsive embraces might be allowed once in a way they were not to be a general rule.

"But I don't understand," said Horace. "Whittaker said Mr. and Mrs. ——"

"Oh yes," said Frank. "Beatrice and I were married some time ago. Married in Munich. Fine city, Horace—you know it, of course. We only came back from our wedding trip a few days ago. You are the first we have seen. We thought perhaps you would put us up for a couple of days."

This request put the Talberts on their mettle as hosts. Hospitality overruled everything. Their house was at the young people's service so long as they wished—the longer the better. "But why did Beatrice run away?" asked Horace.

"Ah, why?" said Frank carelessly. "That's the question."

"It could not have been to avoid you," said Herbert.

"She says not. But one is never sure about such things."

"You were afraid you would have to give up the boy," said Horace to his niece.

She hesitated. "Yes, I feared he would be taken from me," she said. Horace looked triumphantly at Herbert. His theory had been the right one after all.

Then they went off to see that a room was got ready for their unexpected guests. While the Talberts were so

engaged their guests walked down to the village and found Sylvanus Mordle.

Sylvanus positively sparkled when he heard the news. It freed his conscience from a shadow which had for months been lying upon it—the shadow of the “Cat and Compasses.” He took a hand of each of his friends.

“Sorry for one thing—only one. That I didn’t join these hands. Would have given worlds—anything—gone to Munich on purpose. I needn’t tell either of you why I wished to do it.”

The last words were spoken with genuine feeling. Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers pressed the curate’s hands and thanked him for his good wishes. When they left him Sylvanus called for his tricycle and propelled himself ten miles out and ten miles home again. He did so, he told himself, to keep his wind up to sermon mark. He was unwilling to confess that the need for such violent bodily exercise was brought about by the sight of Beatrice as a bride.

That night at Hazlewood House the table was as tastefully laid, the napery as smooth and spotless, the glass as lustrous, the wines as unimpeachable, the cookery as perfect as ever. Frank did nearly all the talking. He spoke of his future plans, of the life he and Beatrice meant to lead, as coolly as if all her friends had been at her wedding. Beatrice said very little. She was simply, quietly happy. Horace thought the young couple behaved very well. As he remarked to Herbert afterwards, “There were none of those embarrassing little familiarities which so often make the company of a bride and bridegroom—well, undesirable.”

Beatrice left the men and strolled through the garden. Horace and Herbert then filled their glasses, and in a courtly way wished Frank every happiness. “Not,” said Horace, “that we can honestly say we approve of your having been married in this clandestine way. But you may of course have had good reasons for it.”

The Talberts felt they had missed a great deal in not having been allowed to superintend everything connected with their niece’s wedding.

“We had good reasons,” said Frank.

"We think, however, we have a right to ask for an explanation of Beatrice's strange conduct—her flight, and concealment."

"Certainly," said Herbert, "most certainly."

So Frank told them all. As he had the command of language and spoke in earnest tones; as he had the skill to make certain shadows look lighter, and to bring out strong points in his client's favour most strongly; as he could speak of what she had endured, and so invoke pity as well as mercy, Beatrice could scarcely have found a better advocate.

But Horace! Herbert! A line of notes of exclamation would not properly express their surprise. With eyes fixed on the speaker, they listened like persons under a spell. Even when Frank had said his say they continued to gaze at him. Horace was the first to speak. "Is this true?" he gasped.

"Every word of it—poor girl!" said Frank.

"Then," said Horace, with his no appeal manner, "we can never forgive her—never see her again. Never!"

He glanced at Herbert, as if expecting the usual echo. But it did not come. Frank rose.

"Very well; then there's nothing more to be said. I'll go and tell my wife to put her things on. Which is the best Blacktown hotel?"

This was a staggering shot. It was a cruel shot. Caruthers was right when he said it would take a great deal to make the Talberts turn even a dog away.

"Give us a few minutes to talk it over," said Herbert. "Let us leave you here for a while."

"No. I'll go into the garden. I can't give you more than twenty minutes, because most of our things are unpacked, and it is growing late."

Before he left them he spoke again; this time with all his former earnestness. "Horace, Herbert," he said, turning from one to the other. "In talking this over remember that if you cannot forgive her we must be strangers hereafter. By casting her off you give the world a right to say what it chooses. Remember also she is my wife—that she

loves you—that she is even now on thorns of suspense awaiting your decision.”

With this he left them, went into the garden, and, out of sight of the house, walked with his arm round Beatrice and bade her be of good cheer.

Before the twenty minutes had expired Whittaker came to inform them that Mr. Talbert desired him to say that tea was waiting in the drawing-room. Frank smiled, drew Beatrice's trembling arm within his own, and led her indoors. As soon as Whittaker had withdrawn after handing round the tea, Horace spoke. He was standing up, his cup in his hand, and his calm eyes seemed to be gazing at nothing.

“My dear Beatrice,” he said very gravely, “I think if you and Frank could manage to prolong your stay till to-morrow week, we might ask a few friends to meet you at dinner. The invitation will be a short one, but under the circumstances will no doubt be excused.”

Carruthers turned away to hide a smile. Yet he felt that considering who the speaker was, no words could have been better, more judiciously, or more delicately chosen to express the fact that Horace and Herbert had decided to forgive the culprit, and not only to say no more about her misdeeds, but also if necessary show the world that they took her part. It was a triumph.

No more was said; but Beatrice could not refrain from letting a few tears of gratitude bedew Horace's immaculate shirt front, or from sitting for a little while with Herbert's hand in hers.

Sir Maingay had, of course, to be told all. This was a painful task, as telling Sir Maingay meant telling Lady Clauson. Her ladyship had her revenge by being able to say the girl had, after all, “done something disgraceful;” but as she thinks a great deal about the honour of her husband's family, she will not proclaim the correctness of her estimate of Beatrice's character.

And others will have to be told. The Oakbury people will hear a great deal. They will shake their heads and gossip. But fortunately, or unfortunately, Mr. and Mrs.

Carruthers's future life will not be spent among these families of position, so such gossip will matter little to them. They will live in the great world of London, and Frank Carruthers may or may not become a famous man. At any rate he will be a happy one.

And Beatrice? Beatrice will make a circle of friends. No secret will be made of the facts that she has been twice married, and that little Harry is her child by her first husband. And if some day it should be whispered in that circle that for some reasons only known to herself she passed for years as a single woman when she was a wife, what will it matter? Better that than passing as a wife when a woman is single.

The world is like a cat, pleasant and sweet when rubbed the right way. Frank and Beatrice are rich—the trustees raised no question on account of the first marriage—they are hospitable, kind-hearted, clever, young, and good-looking, and Frank seems likely to rise to eminence. In such cases friends are very good-natured and trouble themselves very little about idle reports. Indeed, all who care to inquire into Mrs. Carruthers's history may know all there is to be known.

No—not all. Not the means by which happiness was brought within her grasp. That is known only to a wild-eyed, white-faced woman, whose gaunt features grow every day more gaunt, who, day by day, sinks into a more hopeless state. Only she, this victim to the dreariest religious creed the world has yet invented—doubly dreary because it is logical and unanswerable—only she knows how Beatrice's freedom was bought, how her happiness was assured.

And she will soon die and go to her appointed place. But she will die and make no sign.

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